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THE ASTORS

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THE ASTORS

BY

HARVEY O'CONNOR

1941

ALFRED A KNOPF *NEW YORK*

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BOOK ONE

JOHN JACOB ASTOR

CHAPTER *i*

Manhattan Magnate

On a sparkling spring morning in March 1848, John Jacob Astor, the first American Crœsus, lay dying. His body, sink of eighty-four years' infirmities, pressed fat and sodden into a feather bed; his mind was vacant. The spark of vitality barely jumped the narrow gap where death stood waiting.

"I am broken up, it is time for me to be out of the way," he had complained many years before, but needlessly he lingered on.

Now the man who had bargained shrewdly with Washington Irving for immortality was giving up the struggle for life. The greatest merchant of his time, whose ships had dropped anchor in Smyrna and the Pearl River, in Valparaiso and Honolulu; the first of the American business imperialists, who had dreamed of a private Pacific empire of his own stretching from Russian to Spanish America; the daring monopolist whose cunning brain had fashioned the American Fur Company with tools that Rockefeller was to pick up half a century later; the capitalist whose fortune far outstripped any rival's in the New World, waited impassively for the final heartbeat.

Elegant Philip Hone, last of the aristocratic mayors of New York, had jotted in his diary a few years before:

"Mr. Astor, one of our dinner companions yesterday, presented a painful example of the insufficiency of wealth to prolong the life of man. This old gentleman with his $15,000,000 would give it all to have my strength and physical ability. . . . He would pay all my debts if I could insure him one year of my health and strength, but nothing else would extort so much from

him. His life has been spent in amassing money, and he loves it as much as ever. He sat at the dinner table with his head down upon his breast, saying very little, and in a voice almost unintelligible; the saliva dropping from his mouth, and a servant behind him to guide the victuals which he was eating, and to watch him as an infant is watched. His mind is good, his observation acute, and he seems to know everything that is going on. But the machinery is all broken up, and there are some people, no doubt, who think he has lived long enough."

On that electrically-charged spring day New York dashed up and down roaring Broadway, a scant block from quiet LaFayette Place, all unheeding the fate of John Jacob Astor. To Manhattan of 1848 he was already a shadowy figure of the past. The common people knew him not as merchant, monopolist, capitalist, but as old man Astor, the landlord, whose agents trudged the foul streets and back alleys exacting ceaseless tribute. They could not know the ignominy of his last years, his servants tossing him in a blanket to stir up what trickle remained of his vital juices while he muttered to his agent bitter instructions to beat rent money out of a recalcitrant widow. They could not know that despite the golden flow into his coffers, his palsied hands must seek the breast of a wet nurse for his nourishment.

Impassive, William Backhouse Astor awaited his father's death. A heavy-set man with thick jowls and listless expression, he seemed at fifty-five weary of life, surfeited with its luxury, tired of its rent-roll monotony.

In blanket-size newspapers of the day the regent of Astor's millions could read dispatches more thrilling to democratic America than any since 1789. The ship *Caledonia*, sixteen days out of Liverpool, arrived only yesterday at Boston with the "most momentous intelligence ever brought from Europe"—the inglorious flight of Louis Philippe from the French throne. To the American populace it seemed that the bells of history were tolling the knell of hated feudalism. But the younger Astor was uninterested.

In another mansion on marble-colonnaded LaFayette Place, a stone's throw away, life was about to begin. In the womb of John Jacob Astor's granddaughter-in-law, Mrs. John Jacob

Astor III, stirred a child to be born three days later. Under the name of William Waldorf Astor he was to renounce the sweating democracy of his native land and win pocketwise from the King of England a patent assuring the never ending nobility of the Astors.

Not birth, however, attracted the young top-hatted gentlemen of the press, roosting vulture-like on the iron railing of William B. Astor's house. It was death they awaited as they waylaid self-important physicians, noted the owners of splendid carriages whose footmen deposited cards of sympathy, and exchanged anecdotes about the old man who lay flaccid on his feather bed behind darkened windows.

At nine o'clock the morning of March 29, 1848, a servant opened the door and placed a wreath upon it. The young journalists dashed up the steps. A solemn physician assured them that Mr. Astor was dead. Within fifteen minutes the magnetic telegraph — darling novelty of the 1840's — was clicking the news to Boston, Washington, and Chicago. Obituaries, in type for days, were slid into the front-page forms of the penny papers and by noon all New York knew that its wealthiest citizen had died.

It was of money that the editors talked in describing the end of John Jacob Astor. The conservative press preached the moral of the poor butcher-boy of Waldorf in Germany who died, as the editor of the *Recorder* put it, with such wealth as to be "quite out of our small comprehension." Indeed, the word "millionaire" had just been coined to describe the late Peter Lorillard, the tobacco merchant. Beyond compare in the New World, Astor was ranked with Rothschild, Louis Philippe, the Duke of Devonshire, and Sir Robert Peel.

"There are few men," declared *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine*, "whose biography would prove more instructive or more acceptable to the present age than the life of John Jacob Astor. . . . For nearly forty years he has been characterized as perhaps the greatest merchant of this if not of any age — the Napoleon of commerce."

"In the art of prospering in business, he has had no equal," declared *Harper's Magazine*. "To get all that he could and

to keep nearly all that he got — those were the laws of his being."

His old friend Philip Hone noted the fact of Astor's death in his diary and paid him tribute: "All he touched turned to gold, and it seemed as if fortune delighted in erecting him a monument of her unerring potency."

But for Horace Greeley, editor of the radical *Tribune,* the moral of Astor's life was to be found in Scripture: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth." James Gordon Bennett, a pushing fellow without respect for aristocrats, jeered in his plebeian *Herald:* "He has exhibited, at best, but the ingenious powers of a self-invented money-making machine."

Mike Walsh, a tribune of the turbulent, hard-drinking, hard-talking Irishmen of the Bowery, minced no words in the *Subterranean:* "How many men, one hair of whose head is worth more than his whole soulless carcass, have come into the world without a shirt and without a penny, that are daily destined to go out of it worse than they came in."

The cultured New Englander, Horace Mann, warned the young clerks and mechanics of Boston against the example of Astor, "hoarding wealth for the base love of wealth, hugging to his breast, in his dying hour, the memory of his gold and not of his Redeemer; gripping his riches till the scythe of death cut off his hands and he was changed, in the twinkling of an eye, from being one of the richest men that ever lived in this world, to being one of the poorest souls who ever went out of it."

"Nothing but absolute insanity," declared Mann, "can be pleaded in palliation of the conduct of a man who was worth nearly or quite twenty millions of dollars, but gave only some half million of it to any public object. . . . In the midst of so much poverty and suffering as the world experiences, it has become a high moral and religious duty to create an overwhelming public opinion against both the parsimonies and the squanderings of wealth."

The Whig press touched lightly on the character of the greatest American magnate, while the Democratic press was scornful. In that earlier age of the Republic, editors did not bow so low to Mæcenas as they would some eighty years later when they

JOHN JACOB ASTOR I (1763-1848)

Founder of the family and the fortune in America. This portrait by Chappel shows him at about fifty years of age.

PHOTO, CULVER SERVICE

recorded the passing of Astor's closest counterpart in the technique of acquisition — John D. Rockefeller.

But Whig and Democrat alike were full of reminiscences of this extraordinary man whom Bennett had described as a "money-making machine." Few lived who knew him in 1784 as an immigrant lad beating furs for others, or as the hardy independent young merchant who trod Indian trails in the New York wilderness and was by the early 1790's an important factor in the Montreal fur market. But plenty of fellow fur merchants, fellow shipowners, fellow capitalists, knew him in the early 1800's when he was extracting every possible profit from the fur trade; marshalling dozens of agents to wheedle pelts from the Indians in exchange for whisky, guns, and blankets; sorting and baling them not only for the New York or Montreal fur auctions, but for dispatch on his own boats to the best markets in the world, London and Canton; ordering return cargoes from every part of the world for sale to every part; manœuvring and manipulating officers of the young Republic to speed his trade; and, finally, indulging in what seemed to many a whimsical, nonsensical affection for farm lands on Manhattan Island far above the limits of the city.

If most of the anecdotes were more complimentary to Astor's sharpness than to his conscience, that might be set down to human, all too human, envy. Astor had never proposed to be outwitted and he had a mind as long, wide, and deep as could be found between the London docks and the Pearl River. He planned carefully, acted ruthlessly, and laughed uproariously at the discomfiture of his opponents. Nobody in the Republic enjoyed more than he his "mandarin" joke on President Jefferson that netted him a cool two hundred thousand dollars during the Embargo. Sometimes there was little humour in his devices. As one tale had it, Mayor Cornelius W. Lawrence, Astor's own neighbour, had borrowed money from him on a mortgage. The date of the final payment slipped Lawrence's mind; the next morning he apologetically sent a servant around with the money.

"I don't want de money," said Astor, in the thick Rhenish accent that clung to him. "I'll take de land."

The land lay between Fifth Avenue and Broadway and Thirty-

second and Thirty-fifth Streets — a hundred years later the site of the Empire State Building. Like many Astor anecdotes, it was not true, but its spirit lived in authenticated stories that adorned after-dinner conversation on March 29, 1848, at the Astor House, the city's largest hotel, and at other downtown rendezvous of merchants and bankers.

Sharpness, rough humour and tight-fistedness — those were the characteristics that stood out in the stories told that day. He had occasionally outreached himself in his German peasant-like parsimony, as when he lost seventy thousand dollars because he would not buy his captain an accurate chronometer. The captain took a ship owned by a more liberal merchant who reaped a rich reward on tea and nankeens.

None bothered, on that fine spring day of 1848, to weigh the significance of the departed magnate's contribution to the technique of acquisition. A protégé remarked that Astor "was capable of commanding an army of 500,000 men." To this his earliest biographer replied: "That was an erroneous remark. He could have commanded an army of 500,000 tea-chests, with a heavy auxiliary force of otter skins and beaver skins."

A business acquaintance, T. A. Ward of Boston, wrote to a friend in London: "Mr. Astor is dead & supposed leaves some 15 or 18 millions dollars — six clergymen attended to bury the man whose word by his own acknowledgment should never be taken, nor his promise considered binding unless in writing."

Too dazzled by the towering hoard he had built, too close to the unscrupulousness which dimmed his exploits, men knew only that the greatest business enterpriser in the early years of the Republic was going to his grave.

The funeral was held on April 1 at St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, a church he never attended, of a denomination he never joined. Of his eight children but three had outlived him and only two marched in the procession from LaFayette Place to St. Thomas's on Broadway. Relatives, friends, associates, and the curious filled the church.

The body lay in a lead casket lined with white satin, enclosed in a mahogany coffin covered with black silk velvet. Silver lace and silver bullion fringe bordered the velvet. A glass panel re-

vealed the face — heavy, with deep-set eyes, broad square forehead, grey hair. A plaque gave his age as eighty-four years, eight months, and thirteen days.

The rectors of St. Thomas's, St. John's, St. Bartholomew's, Ascension, St. Mark's, and Grace conducted the final rites over the body of the man who had been born a Lutheran and whose allegiance, nebulous at best in later years, had been to the German Reformed Church. But it seemed fitting to his son and heir that the church of the wealthy should shrive the soul of the wealthiest.

The body was buried in the churchyard against the time when Trinity's new cemetery, far out in Carmansville (now at One Hundred and Fifty-fifth Street and the Hudson), would be ready to receive it in a monumental family vault.

Speculation turned to the twenty million dollars that John Jacob Astor could not take with him. Although the incorrigible *Herald* suggested that at least half of it was owed the city, no governmental agency was interested in the fortune beyond probating it. In Wall Street wise men knew that Astor's will would not disperse his fortune. But would it be divided among members of a family that already numbered four generations? Or did old Astor mean to hand his money over to his oldest son, despite laws against entail and primogeniture, in order to found on American soil a hereditary house?

Speculation recalled an anecdote, years before, concerning Astor and Stephen Girard, the Philadelphia shipping master.

"Mr. Astor," remarked Girard, "I am surprised that a man having so much property as yourself should be so anxious to increase it."

"You cannot be so much surprised at my course as I am at your remark, coming as it does from a man who has a much greater fortune than I have, and seems much more desirous to enlarge it," Astor replied.

"Oh yes, but you forget that I have no children to be spoiled by it."

CHAPTER *ii*

Up from Poverty

When William Waldorf Astor became My Lord Astor and cast about for a suitable coat of arms, a scoffing cousin in America suggested a butcher's block with a cleaver rampant in memory of John Jacob's humble origin in Waldorf, Germany. Such insignia would have been incomplete without two supporting figures: an Indian and an immigrant. It was the noble savage who laid furs, the wealth of the wilderness, at Astor's feet; later German and Irish hordes, dumped on narrow Manhattan, clogged Astor's houses and increased his fortune tenfold.

The figure of the immigrant might well have been Astor himself, Adam Smith's ideal young man — poor, healthy, sober, industrious, hungry for money, quick with ambition, as he stepped on American soil early in 1784. No uncouth German peasant was he, but graduate of a three years' apprenticeship with his older brother, George, in the musical-instrument business in London. As soon as the American war was ended, on September 3, 1783, young Astor scouted impatiently for a ship and was on his way in November, with a few guineas and some of his brother's merchandise, to join another older brother, Henry, who had done well as a butcher and drover with the English army of occupation in New York.

Great-grandson William Waldorf insisted that his family was descended from a line of Moor-fighting Spanish grandees, the counts of Astorga. Intent on lifting the Astors out of the ruck of common-soil Germans, he might have traced an authentic Waldensian ancestry, for it was a fact that many had fled the mediæ-

val Savoyan terror and found sanctuary in the village of Waldorf, not far from Heidelberg. There Johann Jacob Astor sired twelve children by two wives. To one chronicler the old man was a "jovial, good-for-nothing butcher . . . much more at home in a beerhouse than at his own fireside." To another he was a "pious, true and godly spirit" possessing a "true understanding, sound elbow grease and a wish to put it to good use." Perhaps both statements were true: as his family grew, Johann Jacob may have deserted the beerhouse for closer attention to bread-winning, or it may have been the other way round. His wife died when young John Jacob was three. Her successor was variously described as a paragon and a harridan, but it was obvious enough why the three brothers sought elbow-room beyond crowded Waldorf.

George, twenty-eight, gave John Jacob, a lad of seventeen, work, a bed within ear-shot of Bowbells in London, and a chance to learn English and business procedure while he waited for the war in America to end. Henry at twenty-six was proving to John Jacob that America had room for him, too. A camp-follower of the British Army who perhaps had landed in America with the Hessians, Henry turned jovially from victualling the British and loyalists to feeding the recent rebels, transformed by victory and the treaty into vindicated patriots. While Henry's pretty wife, Dorothea, was tending the meat stall in Fulton Market, he was out in the Bowery Lane buying cattle and picking up a few country lots as a speculation.

The New York to which Henry welcomed his handsome, vigorous young brother was a city wrecked by war, gutted by fire, looted by the departing British. While thousands of loyalists fled for Nova Scotia and England, more thousands of its pre-revolutionary inhabitants were returning, and the city resounded to the happy music of hammer and saw in the dawn of new liberty.

What drew young Astor to America? Certainly it was not the triumph of abstract ideas of political liberty. Rather this clear-eyed young fellow of twenty-one must be credited with quick insight into America's distinctive opportunities. These were not to be found in Brother Henry's butcher business, nor in peddling

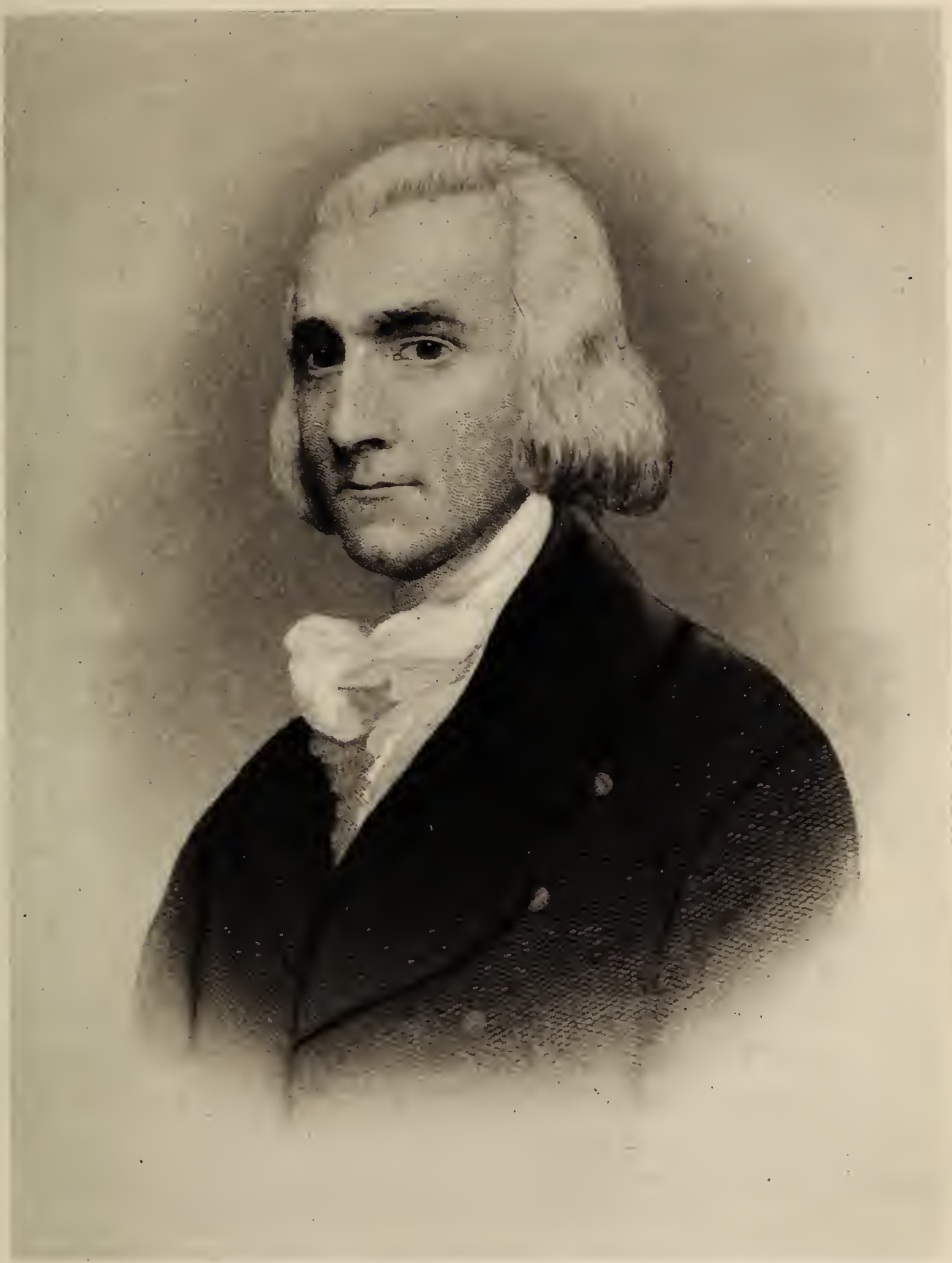
Brother George's flutes, nor in miscellaneous trading, most certainly not in working for others.

What in America would be distinctive to a keen-eyed German lad sophisticated by three years in the world's commercial capital? Why, the vast land behind the seaports, and the Indians, the peculiar and dramatic inhabitants of the New World. But of what value were Indians to this money-eager youngster? The Indians held the key to the wealth of the interior, the furs which London and the Continent craved. Enterprise, cunning, and willingness to endure the frontier's hardships would unlock the continent's wealth; for no corporation as yet bestrode the market or barred the way to a purposeful young man.

Astor's first days in New York were employed not in buying furs but in selling bread and pastries. Soon he was beating furs — a nauseous job — learning the feel of good pelts and the value of hides, scouting about on the river schooners. Then he was taking passage up the Hudson to buy directly from traders and Indians. Within a year or so he was back in London with bales and casks of furs, talking to the importers, becoming marketwise, turning his profits into merchandise — musical instruments and the like.

Young Astor burned with a passion — the passion for money, to be independent, to be a fine merchant. Otherwise he would have been content to tarry with Brother George in London and eventually become his partner in the musical-instrument business. Or, coming to the New World, he would have leaned on his brother Henry and become himself a butcher and drover. Instead he struck out in the business to which destiny pointed, and resolved never to let others make profits which might as well be his.

He might have been content to marry a German immigrant girl, like Henry. Here, too, he strode off the beaten path. Within a year this newcomer was a guest at the Widow Todd's boarding house, where his fine profile and engaging laughter won the heart of Sarah. No beauty, Sarah was pious, strong, hard-working, thrifty — the right kind of wife to keep Astor's shop on the ground floor of her mother's place while he was up the Hudson. Sarah's dowry of three hundred dollars was capital



JOHN JACOB ASTOR I

as a young man

to him; her brother-in-law, Captain William Whetten, a sage adviser on the state of the London market; her nephew, Henry Brevoort, a member of an old land-holding family. Talk at the boarding house was of ships and freights, of ports and politics in Europe — exactly the kind of table talk to interest the earnest young German as he sat by the side of his bride. She was to mother his eight children, and her glum blood was strong.

By dint of Sarah's dowry, the wages he made as a furrier's clerk, by loans from Brother Henry and the help of William Backhouse, the big merchant, young Astor climbed the lower rungs of his calling. His up-country trips extended within a few years beyond Albany into the forests along the Mohawk and up toward Lake Champlain. With a pack of trading goods on his back to give the Indians in return for their furs, he tramped the trails, bivouacking sometimes under his blanket or sleeping by the fire in rude settlers' huts. The hardships he brushed away, for he was making money and planning the arduous journey up to Montreal, the fur capital of America. Four years after he had landed in New York he was rich enough to buy three thousand dollars' worth of furs in Montreal, to be shipped to London, Rotterdam, and New York. The next fall he was back buying fifteen thousand " Good and Merchantable Musquash Skins " and dealing in fur futures for the coming year.

In this period Sarah was managing the store in New York, selling pianos and flutes, furs, and a miscellany of goods in which her husband's eye detected a margin of profit, nursing the while a growing family. Sarah herself became a keen judge of furs and could bargain with the best of them. Later she was known as a pious, God-fearing woman devoted to her Bible and her children; in Astor's first years she was the keystone supporting the arch of his ambitions.

In 1789 the man who would one day be known as the Landlord of New York bought from Brother Henry his first lots, out on the Bowery Road by Elizabeth Street. In the next two years his real-estate purchases totalled seven thousand dollars — the savings of his fur trade. Six years after his arrival he was acknowledged a prosperous merchant, indistinguishable to be sure from the ruck, but nevertheless a substantial citizen.

Those early years had been laborious — the ardours of the trail, the back bent under trading goods, the weeks spent in beating and baling evil-smelling hides. Now he had agents upstate watching and buying for him, while he proceeded to Montreal, where he was an honoured guest at the Beaver Club — the rendezvous of the grand French seigneurs and the hard-dealing Scotsmen. But it galled him to have to bargain with these shrewd men for furs which they had bought for a song from Indians on soil nominally American. The Union Jack still waved over Niagara, Sandusky, Detroit, and Michilimackinac, and the trade of the Great Lakes was a Montreal monopoly. Worse yet, these furs from American soil must first go to London before they could be shipped to New York, for direct trade between Canada and the States was forbidden.

John Jay, leader of the Federalist aristocrats of New York, opened Astor's eyes regarding the importance of government to an ambitious business man. Jay descended from the Supreme Court bench to persuade London to honour the Treaty of Paris, to give up the southern shore of the Lakes, and to make a commercial treaty with the young Republic. Jay's ace in the hole was the American alliance with France, and he traded it for the British promise to move troops out of the Northwest Territory and to sign a hobbled trade treaty. "Now I will make my fortune in the fur trade," Astor declared.

That was in 1795. Five years later he was reputed to be worth $250,000 and in the front rank of American fur merchants. He still bought in Montreal, but his furs went directly to New York or the Continent without London's intervention, and his agents scouted the rich Great Lakes country. He bought guns, powder, blankets, trinkets cheaply in quantity in London for the Indian trade, and he was able to hold his furs for the best market.

In London again, he was fêted as an important New York merchant, and then he passed on to Paris and the Leipzig fair, combining business and pleasure in the first semi-vacation in sixteen years. When Edward Ellice, later to be known as the First Commoner of England, was sent to the States as a lad, he was consigned to Astor, who took him up to Albany where the patroon Stephen van Rensselaer, richest man in North America, enter-

tained them lavishly in the company of George Clinton, General Schuyler, General Gansevoort, Chancellor Lansing, and Colonel Bayard.

Astor's taste in trade was catholic. He still imported musical instruments, and delved in the instruments of death as well. French privateers were roaming the seas. Shipowners and buccaneers on the Spanish Main were eager buyers of Astor's cannon and muskets, " London patent shot," saltpetre, pistols, and carbines. He began to dabble in the cargoes of China vessels and to advertise " nankeens, lutestrings [lustreens], muslin, sattins, shawls " as well as Hyson and Souchong teas.

A brisk ten-minute walk from his home down Broadway through Wall Street brought him to South Street, prickly with protruding bowsprits and towering masts of the world's commerce. No sooner was a ship eased into her berth than Astor was clambering aboard to check on his cargo, cursing at damaged goods or bad quality, jotting notes in a fantastic spelling about miscarried orders, calculating prices to be asked. Or he was bustling up and down the street where auctioneers' hammers echoed, watching for bargains, noting carefully prices asked and bid. Often he was in his own shop showing his wares to customers, examining the latest shipment of furs, correcting his clerks.

The John Jacob Astor of 1800, a man of thirty-seven, could be satisfied with his importance, his wealth, his standing in the community. If any of the " old families " cared to despise his rough manners, his uncouth speech, or his modest house, he had an oath and a boisterous laugh for such pretty people. For he belonged to the real aristocracy of this seaport — the merchants. Narrow seemed their concentration on West Indies rum, West African slaves, Sheffield cutlery, Manchester cloth; yet the world was intimately with them, and the great fortunes of the times would be theirs. They were the possessors of ready cash at a time when banks were rickety affairs. Theirs was the freemasonry of international commerce, and the government in Washington waited anxiously upon their interests.

Fur money was laborious money. The uncontrolled frontier, the uncontrollable market, poised never ending uncertainty over

the fur merchant's ledgers. Hardy whites who scorned civilization to trade with Indians hardly less civilized were unstable factors in a merchant's business, and if Astor made money, it was by dint of furious labour, daring gambles, and heady planning. A mis-step, buying the wrong furs or landing them in London immediately after a rival's shipment, or failure to turn London profits into trading goods at a comfortable margin — these meant losses. If his wealth in 1800 was measured in six figures, it was through toil that nearly wrecked his body during his first sixteen years in America.

Then suddenly money began to gush into his coffers. He decided to take a share in the ship *Severn* and load her with silver specie, ginseng to restore the depleted virility of aging Chinese mandarins, and furs to clothe them and their concubines against the harsh winters of a land long denuded of fur-bearing animals. In return came tea without benefit of London customs and profits, silks, and fine cloths for the budding aristocrats of the seaboard cities and for reshipment to the Baltic, the Mediterranean, wherever demand was backed by cash.

This one cargo poured into his hands tens of thousands of dollars. Here, then, was the bonanza to be tapped by furs. Convinced that destiny's finger had appointed him the link between Asia and Europe, he outfitted ships to touch at every port. In the early years of the 1800's Astor suddenly expanded from a fur merchant catering to the London market into an international trader who saved his finest pelts for China, exchanging them for silks and teas, selling these in the best American and European markets, and turning part of those profits into blankets, guns, and trading goods bought at cheapest prices in enormous quantities for the Indian country.

Astor's remarkable burgeoning in the early 1800's from a moderately successful merchant into a man of wealth was to give rise years later to fanciful tales. It was to be argued seriously in federal court that he was the junior partner of one John N. Emerick, shipmate on his first voyage to America, who instructed him in the furrier's trade, and that therefore tens of millions of dollars were owing to Emerick's heirs.

Another, with smooth plausibility that made his tale a text for

aspiring law students entangled in the problem of Truth vs. Error, was to argue that Astor had really found Captain Kidd's treasure on a desolate island off the Maine coast, and suit was solemnly threatened to recover $5,112,234.80, the value of the hoard with accumulated interest. That story became one of the most celebrated hoaxes in history, and an English news editor as late as 1937 was cabling his New York correspondent for verification.

A story prevalent in Astor's own time was that he owed his fortune to "Permit No. 68," given him by the Governor of the East India Company on his first trip back to England. The Governor, a fellow Waldorfer, was much taken with the engaging, audacious young man, it was said, and furthered his fortunes by granting him permission to trade in Canton. Astor borrowed money and sent a ship to China which stopped at the Sandwich Islands and took on a load of firewood. The lumber turned out to be precious sandalwood, eagerly sought for Chinese temples. Alas for good yarns! The East India Company had no monopoly on the China trade and so any "Permit No. 68" was just a piece of paper, no trace has ever been found of the rich New York merchant who financed Astor, and American sea captains had been in the sandalwood trade since 1792.

Even Astor was embarrassed by the periodic deluge of gold that spirted into his office with the return of each ship from Asia and Europe. What should he do with it? Build more ships for the China trade? Certainly not — it would be foolish to swamp the wharves of New York with silk and tea. Should he buy more furs? Just as foolish. Too many furs were being bought as it was. Nor did he relish lending money to others: if money was to be made with his money, he would make it.

He solved his problem in the simplest of ways, for he was still a good bit of a German villager at heart and loved land. He delighted in riding horseback out the country lanes to escape the unswept, unsewered, trash-heaped city streets. A half-mile up Broadway from his home, he came to the open country of dusty paths, green farms, lush meadows, hills adorned by the Grecian-temple homes of the patricians. A favourite ride was out the river road through the old King's Farm, which had fallen to

Trinity as successor of the Established Church. Often he speculated on the unhappy plight of Trinity, limited by a jealous Episcopalian-baiting Legislature to a twelve-thousand-dollar yearly income from this tract that stretched from the north limits of the city up to Greenwich Village. Trinity had to lease out its lands at ridiculously low rentals; unfortunately that was before he had plenty of money.

In 1797 the Legislature named a committee to poke about in Trinity's affairs. Aaron Burr, who headed the committee, emerged in command of a substantial part of the 465-acre Mortier lease, good for sixty-nine more years at $269 yearly rental to Trinity. In 1803 Vice President Burr, more deeply in debt than ever, turned to that lover of the land and possessor of ready cash, John Jacob Astor. For $62,500, Astor took 241 lots of the Mortier lease off Burr's hands. The land lay between the present confines of Spring and West Houston, Varick and Greenwich Streets. With it passed Richmond Hill, Burr's pseudo-Greek mansion with lofty portico and Ionic columns, all of sound two-inch pine plank. But Astor had no use for such showy elegance, and he leased the mansion to Governor George Clinton.

With particular interest, too, Astor followed the affairs of the Eden family, whose farm sloped down from the Bloomingdale Road (Broadway) to the Hudson just north of what was to be Forty-second Street. The heir, a "fritterer," turned up in chancery court. Astor, with an associate, bid $25,000 for seventy acres. Then the two men cut up their land, Astor taking that nearest the Bloomingdale Road. A century later it would be worth at least $20,000,000, but even shrewd Astor could not foresee the Great White Way that would run along the edge of his Eden acres.

Early in 1804 Aaron Burr was nearing the end of his tether. Ever more money he begged of Astor, and ever more lots of the Mortier lease went into Astor's hands. Defeated for governor of New York, Burr challenged Alexander Hamilton, shot and killed him, sold another lease to Astor for $8,000 — and disappeared. In that year, too, Astor bought for £9,000 a chunk of property near where the Bloomingdale Road and Bowery Lane met and then leased it to a Frenchman for a pleasure ground, the Vaux-

hall Gardens. Astor Place and LaFayette Street now mark the site and Astor was to die in a mansion built there by his son.

Another Vice President of the United States found high social and political position too much for his pocketbook. In 1805 George Clinton, Jefferson's lieutenant in New York, got $75,000 in cash from the fur and China merchant for 243 lots in Greenwich Village, between what are now Gansevoort and Fifteenth Streets and running from the Hudson River to Ninth Avenue and Hudson Street.

Next year Astor negotiated with Trinity Church for land between Christopher and Houston Streets along the river, for which he paid $70,000. He then applied to the city for water rights at nominal prices so that he could fill in the tide-washed property to create more lots and later build docks.

In the four years 1803–6 this land-hungry merchant invested nearly $300,000 of his China profits in the rocky backbone of Manhattan while his friends looked on aghast and his rivals with glee. The man was daft, they agreed. At that very time a Southern gentleman who had purchased a tract on Manhattan was brought up for *de lunatico inquirendo* proceedings at his home-county courthouse. Astor was warned that he was frittering away his surplus; days might come when he would need ready cash and he would have on his hands lots on which no one wanted to build.

What exactly did Astor descry up the island? Certainly he could not have visualized towering skyscrapers or solid acres of six-story tenements packed more densely than the warrens of Bombay and Shanghai.

In 1804 New York was a city of little more than sixty thousand souls, with few advantages over Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, or Charleston. Enthusiasts peering down the century predicted that some day the city would boast a quarter-million population. By then the Eden acres might be sold to bankers or merchants seeking country homes, even become a fashionable new Greenwich Village to those willing to travel an hour each way behind a pair of fast trotters. Actually, however, within twenty years the Erie Canal was built, and Astor's faith was vindicated by the "red line of the built-up city . . . advancing like fire on a

prairie against the wind, devouring with brick and mortar every green thing in its way."

The fur merchant himself had no idea in 1804 that his farms one day would pour millions into the laps of his descendants. Readily he sold portions of his out-of-town properties where a tidy profit was promised; before he died he was to sigh a vain regret that he had not bought the whole of upper Manhattan.

Nor was he the only man to know that farms must appreciate in value. Many saw that the city must march up the island, long and narrow, but few had the patience to bury money, profitless, in farmlands which would not be cut up into lots for another generation, if ever. More inviting it was to expand their own businesses, to invest in loans, to deal in actual lots within the city's confines. Those who bought country farms for summer retreats inadvertently laid the basis for future fortunes.

Astor himself bought a country estate up by the Hellgate (known to the pious as Hurlgate) near what is now Eighty-eighth Street. Unfortunately, a favourite grandson (on the distaff side) sold it to a Catholic nunnery and a great-great-grandson, Vincent Astor, had to buy back parts of it for a fashionable East End Avenue development.

Astor burned his fingers along the Mohawk, where he took a flier in 37,000 acres. The titles were involved, the squatters suspected a deep Tory trick, and Astor wrote in anguish: "About 1 haure ago I had to pay 2040 Dollars for Cast in aure cursed Sute or go to Prison. I am very sick of the Busniess all the mony I Can muster gos for this Damd businiss it is too much for me to Lay aut." Later he appealed to his partners: "Lets get the money or Sent the Raskels to Brison at Least those who So well Deserve it."

Astor's country home at Hellgate, surrounded by the estates of Nate Prime, the city's leading banker, the Gracies, Crugers, Schermerhorns, and Rhinelanders, was the refuge for his growing family against the heat and the dread plagues that drove New York's upper classes out of the city each summer. By 1805 he had five children. His oldest, Magdalen, seventeen, named for his mother, he would take to Montreal next year to introduce to the French and Scots fur-traders' families. John Jacob, Jr.,

fourteen, would never be introduced anywhere, for he was an imbecile and the one cloud in his father's life. For years he insisted that the other children treat his namesake as normal, but that failed. Within a few years the boy would be lodged in a mansion of his own, attended by physician, tutor, and staff to make his life as agreeable and isolated as possible. Astor's hopes must then fall on William Backhouse, named for a merchant who had helped Astor in his first years in New York. He was a quiet lad of thirteen, studious and favouring his dour mother. Dorothea, ten, was named for her aunt who had married Astor's brother Henry, the rich drover. The youngest, Eliza, only four, was a frail child. Two had died.

For his town house Astor deserted lower Broadway with its clutter of commerce and shops and moved up the street into a dwelling built by Rufus King, first U. S. Senator from New York, Minister to England, and Federalist candidate for Vice President in the hopelessly non-Federalist years of 1804 and 1808. This new home was opposite the Park, later to be graced with New York's City Hall.

The man who knew intimately past, present, and would-be Vice Presidents had little time for politics himself except as they affected his own business. In his first year in America he swore allegiance to the new country and soon joined the Holland Lodge of the Freemasons, which conducted its affairs " in the Low Dutch language." Probably there he met Clinton, senior warden and later master of the lodge, and became a close friend of the local leader of Jeffersonian democracy. That, however, did not lessen his admiration for John Jay, the city's chief Federalist, who had opened the Great Lakes to his agents. Politics were business, and Astor made it his concern to know those in positions of power irrespective of ideology.

In religion he made no pretence to excessive godliness. A man of the world who understood that on week-days the Golden Rule was not likely to return a large profit, he contented himself with perfunctory allegiance first to his native Lutheran church and then, as he rose in the world, to the Reformed, favourite of many of his solid fellow-merchants. He gave sparingly to the church and shunned charity, for had not his own life proved

that any young fellow with wits and health might prosper? In any event pious Sarah, her Bible and Dodderidge constantly by her side, made up for his laxity. He commented that those most enthusiastic about heaven showed little eagerness to be translated into happy eternity.

CHAPTER *iii*

The First Monopolist

In the opening years of the nineteenth century fortune delighted to conspire with John Jacob Astor. Had not Thomas Jefferson doubled the field of the fur merchant's speculation by annexing Louisiana? Had not the Czar opened his American territory to a trading company with which Astor could bargain? Had not his captains reported an imperial domain on the North Pacific coast, a no man's land overrun with beaver waiting to be trapped? Dominating the American fur market, counting in tens of thousands of dollars the reward from each China voyage, he could be confident that by 1810 he would be a millionaire.

Great designs formed in his mind. All the while, between checking on cargoes and agents, pondering reports from Gothenburg, Hamburg, Cadiz, and Smyrna, instructing captains and supercargoes minutely on sales and purchases, he chafed because the Canadian lords were organizing companies that drove up the prices he must pay for furs and drove down the prices he got in Europe. Yes, the fur trade this side of the border must be organized, too; the pressure on the market must be eased; prices controlled. Some might call it monopoly, he would call it the American Fur Company.

Alas for Astorian plans in a Napoleonic world! Canton, Alaska, the Columbia? Why, his ships couldn't even leave New York harbour after Jefferson laid down his 1807 embargo. He fidgeted and squirmed for a loophole through which just one ship might sail for the Pearl River. Officialdom was stony-faced.

Then one fine day a Chinese, Punqua Wing-chong, presented

himself to Senator Mitchill of New York, a man " strangely deficient in that useful commodity called common sense," as Philip Hone put it. The Senator was impressed with Punqua's lugubrious story and gladly gave him a letter to the President stating that " the affairs of his family and particularly the funeral obsequies of his grandfather, required his solemn attention " in far-away China.

The sage of Monticello was touched by the mandarin's plight and was mindful that a courtesy extended to a powerful Chinese nobleman might be remembered at the Celestial court. Gallatin, Jefferson's sharp-witted Secretary of the Treasury, was wary. Just how did the mandarin propose to go to China? On the *Beaver*, Mr. Astor's *Beaver*? Oh! And he wished to take forty-five thousand dollars in specie, ginseng, cochineal, furs? And the *Beaver* was to pick up whatever merchandise awaited American merchants in the godowns along the Pearl River?

" Had I any discretion as to the application itself," Gallatin complained to Jefferson, " I would have hesitated; for I apprehend that there is some speculation at bottom; and every deviation from the general rules is considered a favouritism and excites dissatisfaction."

The merchants of New York and Philadelphia roared in rage. This mandarin was known to be a petty shopkeeper. " A Chinaman picked up in the park . . . a common Chinese dock loafer . . . perhaps an Indian dressed up in silk and adorned with a peacock fan," gibed the Federalist press. Gallatin replied that the President had supposed Punqua " of a higher grade." But it was too late — the *Beaver* had slipped out of New York and was well on her way to the Horn.

She returned " with a full cargo of teas, silks and nankeens, to John Jacob Astor " — the first ship in from China in a full year or more. Astor is said to have realized $200,000 on her, for the States were thirsty for his tea and ladies eager for his silks. Just about then the Cosine farm, lying north of the Eden farm, was writhing in court judgments, foreclosures, mortgages, and trusteeships. Astor bought it in 1809 and became lord of a tract running from Broadway to the Hudson between West Fifty-third and West Fifty-seventh Streets.

The embargo lifted, Astor's fertile, contriving mind returned to his project of a fur company dominating the wilderness and the market. The venture, he wrote Jefferson, would be " of such magnitude " that it " would require a greater capital than any individual or unincorporated association could well furnish." The New York Legislature was delighted to applaud his patriotism in 1808 by incorporating the American Fur Company. The Charter spoke much of directors and stockholders, of quorums and majorities. Actually, it was his purpose, as one biographer put it, " to concentrate the western fur trade in the hands of only such American citizens as had been born in Waldorf, Germany, in 1763, and had arrived in the United States from London in the spring of 1784."

His first step was to ally himself with the powerful Montreal fur kings through setting up the South West Company in which they and Astor each held a half-interest. Trading spheres were delimited, crafty Astor stipulating that the South West Company was to operate for the most part on American soil, and the North West Company on Canadian. Within a few years he was to profit by a law barring Canadians from the American fur trade and to take over the South West Company lock, stock, and barrel. But at the time it looked to the Canadians as if they were being given a half-interest in the American market.

His captains roaming the Pacific had reported the vast unoccupied spaces lying between the Czar's dominions in the North and those claimed by His Most Catholic Majesty. These he decided, should constitute his own private Astorian empire. But here, too, he must proceed warily. His Canadian associates were also eying the Columbia country with its wealth of beaver inland and otter in the seas. Astor dispatched a vessel to New Archangel to parley with Governor Baranoff, to dispose of merchandise sorely needed there, to pick up furs gathered by the Russian-American Corporation, to trade clandestinely with the Indians whether in Russian or Spanish territories. The voyage netted him perhaps as much as $100,000.

Allied with the Russians to the north, he decided that now he must strike hard and fast for the Columbia. One expedition was to proceed by sea, another by land, to set up a post at the mouth

of the river. Volumes have been written about the voyage of the *Tonquin*, of her martinet commander and the dour Scotch partners Astor selected to manage his Pacific Fur Company, of the disastrous crossing of the Columbia bar, of the establishment of Fort Astoria on May 18, 1811, and of the *Tonquin's* shuddering end when incensed Indians slaughtered the captain and crew and were in turn destroyed by the explosion of the ship's magazine.

The expedition by land fared little better. Trying to trace Lewis's and Clark's footprints across the Rockies, the party split into four groups which straggled into Fort Astoria early in 1812. The partners nevertheless established trading posts in the interior. At that point, the crack of doom — the War of 1812. Astor was on his way by coach to Washington to plead with Madison to maintain peace; half-way there he heard the news and returned to New York, gnawed with fear for his defenceless colony, prey of the first British ship that happened by.

"As Soon as war was Declard," he explained, "I considerd Columbia in Danger if not Lost — but wishng to Safe it as much as I wishd to Safe my Life it acurd to me that I aught to procure ane or two Confidential persons to go to england & there Pracure a neutral vessel put on board of her Arms munition Blankets & and Cleare for the Pacific ocation but go Derict to Columbia for this purpose I placed 12000 £ Stg in the hands of the gentlemen whom I Send — a vessel was pracurd and Loaded but the Delay is beyond everything." Then, through the Russian Consul General in New York he connived with the British Admiral off New York to pass a ship, ostensibly bound straight for Sitka.

By the autumn of 1812 his friendly enemy, the North West Company, had sent a British frigate to the Pacific Northwest to take over in the name of the Crown. Learning this, he begged Monroe to send a swift sloop-of-war to overhaul the Britisher "at the very *mauth of Columbia.*" He remarked offhand that he was contracting with Secretary Gallatin for a big slice of the war loan.

Jefferson at Monticello was given a glowing account of the success of Astoria "fare exceeding our most Sangguine exspectations." But that, alas, had only excited British cupidity, "ever

being Ready to graps at & to monopolize the commerce of the world."

In the summer of 1813 the Pacific Fur partners, unwitting of the war, returned from their outlying posts to Astoria with their booty. Partner Cox was enthusiastic:

"The great object of every Indian was to obtain a gun. Now a good gun was not to be had under 20 beaver skins; a few short ones we gave them for 15: and some idea of the profit may be formed, when I state that the wholesale price of a gun is about one pound seven shillings, while the average value of 20 beaver skins is about 25 pounds! Two yards of cloth, which originally cost 12 shillings, would generally bring six or eight beavers, value eight or 10 pounds! and so on in proportion for other articles; — but they were satisfied, and we had no cause to complain."

That fall a strong detachment of North West Company men showed up in Astoria with the news that a British frigate would soon appear in the Columbia, its guns aimed at Fort Astoria. They proposed that Astor's partners capitulate then and there and salvage something; otherwise the frigate would take all as a prize of war.

It was a tough problem for the Pacific Fur partners. Here they were, Britishers all, under an American flag, bargaining for the surrender of Astoria with men of the North West Company, Britishers too, many of them friends and former associates. Loyalty to Astor, loyalty to the Crown, loyalty to their own financial stakes in Pacific Fur — which would win?

On October 16, 1813 they sold out the Pacific Fur Company, lock, stock, and barrel — Astoria and the posts, the stores and furs, for twenty cents on the dollar.

And all because the crew of the frigate that Monroe had finally granted Astor was at the last minute transferred to Commodore Chauncey for service on the Great Lakes.

Gone, for lack of a frigate, 614,000 square miles on the American continent — a domain larger than the thirteen colonies. Knocked down for a song, by British subjects to other British subjects, John Jacob Astor's great dream of an empire owned and operated by himself, pouring into his hands its treasures,

lifting high above the Knickerbocker aristocracy which snubbed him, this butcher's son of Waldorf. Gone, for want of a good captain, a good overland leader, loyal partners, and a frigate, the opportunity of stamping his name on the Evergreen Coast of the Pacific Northwest.

The greatest defeat in Astor's life could be charged to his colour-blindness in flags. The Stars and Stripes, the Union Jack — these were pieces of cloth raised on ships to identify their nationality, and little more. A merchant to the core, he kept his nationalism skin-deep. For him there was no issue between the two nations worth the price of war. Uprooted from Germany, a transient in England, a dweller in America because here money could be made, Astor planned carefully each commercial move, yet ignored the essential danger to his colony.

A stout ship armed for battle, an American band equipped to fight and eager to down the traditional enemy, and Astoria might have been saved. But not until war had come did he equip a brig, loaded with arms and ammunition right in London itself, to sail to the relief of his American outpost. And never did he question the dispatch of British subjects to guard his overseas enterprise. Americans were not good fur men, he insisted. And it was furs, not nationalism, that interested him.

Give him credit, though, for his imperial dream. "If we claim the country at all," declared Jefferson after the wretched war was ended, "it must be on Astor's settlement."

He was to live to see a condominium over the Columbia replaced by the Stars and Stripes, floating over the first post office west of the Rockies, at Astoria, Oregon. But that could not remove the present sting of a triumphant North West Company ruling his coveted beaver country from Fort Vancouver.

In the midst of this sorrow Astor was cheered by the government's desperate need of money. The United States Bank had gone down under hatred of South and West, and that tickled him. He had fallen out with the bank's directors; further, he felt that a chaotic banking situation would place the bankrupt government directly at the mercy of men of means. Eagerly he scanned Gallatin's sixteen-million-dollar war loan in 1813 and then sat back to watch his brother merchants in New England

boycott the Treasury's frantic efforts to sell it. Northern Federalists looked on happily at Gallatin's discomfiture. Fine phrases about the rights of man would not feed soldiers or equip ships for the hated war on England. Many believed the crazy Union would fall to pieces, ending " Mr. Madison's war " automatically.

Gallatin was back, hat in hand, to plead once again with David Parish and Stephen Girard of Philadelphia, with Astor and Herman LeRoy of New York. With two millions in war-bound cash lying idly to his account, Astor outlined his terms and then proceeded with Girard to form the first bond syndicate in American history. He offered two million dollars, persuaded Parish and Girard to take six million. Federalist editors raged at the spectacle of " foreigners " — Gallatin, Astor, Girard, and Parish — financing an unholy war and drew sarcastic comfort in contemplating the fate of men who lent money to a government without revenue.

But it was not for the Astor syndicate to complain of buying six-per-cent bonds at eighty-eight cents on the dollar with a quarter-per-cent commission where smaller fry had paid par. The more so as the issue became the darling of the war speculators, selling ten to fourteen points off in Boston, holding above 90 in New York and Philadelphia, and at par in Baltimore. Such an opportunity in telegraphless days to buy in Boston and sell in Baltimore found the syndicate in high fettle.

After the sack of Washington the war loan sank to 75 and even lower. But Astor, like a distinguished financier to come, did not believe in selling America short. Having sold, he now bought. Years later the *New York Tribune* accused him of making even more than his speculation indicated. According to Horace Greeley, he gave Gallatin bank notes worth fifty cents on the dollar and thus " must have cleared more than a million dollars in hard money on every two millions of paper thus lent."

Now that he had a stake in the government's credit, the financier reversed his attitude toward the national bank and called, late in 1814, a meeting of wealthy New Yorkers at his home to insist that " we are all gone " if the bank project were delayed. The end of the war ended that emergency.

To Astor, Adam Smith's ideal " economic man," it seemed as

natural to float part of an American war loan in London as it did, on the eve of the war, to offer to lend fifty thousand pounds to help equip the British Army in Quebec. There was money to be made, and that was his only test.

Nor did he hesitate to flash the news of the declaration of war into Canada itself and thus prevent American surprise attacks on British frontier forts. It was not that he was treacherous, but that he had furs in Canada which he wanted hustled to the border. It was an Astor message to an Astor agent at the Sault that enabled the British to swoop down on Mackinac Island and capture by surprise the northernmost American post. The news sent a shock through the States, for hordes of Indians in war paint descended on frontier settlements, accompanied in many cases by Astor employees, to massacre and desolate.

From his point of view, the leading American fur-trader was fully justified, for did not his furs pour over the frontier? Through Rouse's Point alone came one shipment — 20,380 martins, 46 bear, 18,000 muskrats, 526 fisher, 6,021 otter, 3,389 mink, 2,048 fox, 271 cat, and 6 wolf skins. His agents became embroiled in a smuggling scandal, the inspector was charged with taking bribes, and the affair reeked, but nothing illegal was ever proved against Astor himself.

The contriving mind that engineered the mandarin hoax was now confronted by huge shipments of furs warbound in New York. How could he get them out to Europe through the British blockade? This time he and his friend, the Russian Consul General, discovered a distinguished pro-royalist, anti-Napoleon French general living peacefully in New Jersey. Unlike the mandarin, he was genuine. General Moreau was persuaded to offer his services to England and the British Admiral riding off New York was persuaded to pass him. Astor's fine ship *Hannibal* was available. A few months later General Moreau lay dead at the Battle of Dresden but Astor's furs had been sold in a hungry market. Adopting the Russian flag, the *Hannibal* returned " to a good Market. . . . I have done very well in the voyage."

If some held that Astor's performance in the war fell short of patriotism, certainly the authorities in Washington could not af-

ford to be critical. Generous Jefferson thought highly of the enterprising merchant whose Pacific Fur Company and projected American Fur Company could bring the wilderness within control. Gallatin's distaste for this master of trade and finance halted before the very evident fact that he had perhaps saved the Republic in 1813 with his syndicate. Some might impeach his loyalty, but at any rate he was not to be classed with the openly traitorous elements of Boston. While President Madison eyed coolly some of his projects, he was mindful that the Administration needed the support of at least one leading merchant in New York.

But it was with James Monroe, Madison's Secretary of State, that Astor was increasingly intimate. Many a "privert" letter he sent on to Monroe to keep him informed of the state of things in New York during the war and to advise him on patronage in the all-important customs office.

In a letter to Monroe he urged peace by sacrificing a main point for which the war was declared, the right of the British to search American ships and seize seamen.

"Senice I had the pleasure to See you at Washington I have Recid a Letter from Gottenbourg and an other from London boath are from very Inteligent Merchants after Speeking an the Subjict of commerce thy bouth give it as thire apinian that Great Britain will not make Peace with this country unless we acknowladge thea Right of theire coming an Board of aur Ships to take thire Seamen or Subjicts — the Englishman Says if your government or the publick mind is not prepard to Conseed this point the war will go on untill thy are it is to me Some what Singular that two merchants the ane in Londan & the other in Sweedne Should at Same time write & express opinions So Leik each ather."

It was natural for Astor to favour Secretaries of State, particularly in 1814–15, when a treaty of peace was to be signed and it was essential that Astor get his private diplomats — Son-in-law Bentzon and others — over to Ghent in order to have the first flash on the news. On that hung the speedy departure of Astor's own navy, just as his quick dispatches to Canada in 1812 had

salvaged his furs. The first boats into New York from China and Europe would skim the cream of a waiting market. Monroe helped him get his aides to Europe.

Bentzon hovered over John Quincy Adams and Gallatin in Ghent seeking the first news of peace. Adams, who as Minister in St. Petersburg had helped further Astor's relations with the Russian court, was insulted at Bentzon's behaviour. Astor could stand that; on Adams's return from Ghent, he was a guest at Astor's house and the merchant escorted the diplomat to Tammany Hall for a festive banquet, for he could see that here was a rising star — indeed, Adams was soon to be Secretary of State, the position which interested Astor most.

Like Vice Presidents Burr and Clinton, Monroe found official life trying on his purse. To whom should he turn, then, in 1814 for money but to his friend the wealthy New York merchant? Monroe said he did not solicit Astor's $5,000 loan but later he became a heavy borrower and Astor a lenient lender, who in 1820 sought only the interest — some $2,100 — on his money. Nor apparently did Astor press for repayment until after Monroe left the White House, when he was forced to sell slaves to discharge part of his debt.

The hard winter of the merchants' discontent gave way in 1815 to the springtime of commerce. Napoleon was sent to St. Helena to stay, and the wonderful nineteenth century struck its mercantile stride.

Astor faced the future with great plans, plenty of money, ships bought cheaply from war-distressed shipowners. But no longer was he the handsome youth with hawk-like features whom Stuart painted in the 1790's. His body, grown soft and pudgy, sought to burst his waistcoat buttons, his cheeks were flabby, flesh hung under his chin, and pouches underlay eyes which remained small and shrewd. It was the face, a biographer observed, of a prosperous, well-satisfied butcher.

At the age of fifty-two he was the grandfather of three children, taking especial delight in his second namesake, John Jacob III, William B.'s boy, and in Sarah, offspring of his formidable daughter and his diplomatic son-in-law, Adrian Bentzon. This remarkable adventurer had been dislodged by the British as

Governor of the Danish West Indies and was anxious to revenge himself and further his fortunes in New York. Life with Magdalen was no joy, but fortunately he was abroad much of the time doing his father-in-law's business.

Another of Astor's daughters, Dorothea, had eloped during the war at the age of seventeen with a dashing New Hampshire officer, Walter Langdon, while visiting in Washington. Astor was bitterly indignant. He believed sons-in-law should be useful; fighting was something that could be left to others. The Langdons for years were subjected to parental non-intercourse.

Because his oldest son, John Jacob, Jr., was mentally incompetent, Astor's hopes fell on William Backhouse. Provided with the best private schooling to be had here, William was shipped over to Göttingen for university training. That in itself reflected the stature of this man Astor, for most young men of position at that time could not even boast the advantages of a rickety college education in their own country; hardly any were sent abroad, and certainly not to Germany. This merchant, it was plain, did not share the self-made man's contempt for culture. Indeed, he delighted in the theater and in music, in listening to the merry songs of his youngsters, and in inviting men of letters to his table. He even hired a poet as secretary, and later a bookish teacher who intrigued him into his only considerable philanthropy — the Astor Library.

His dazzling success he could attribute not only to bold enterprise but to cautious execution. No clerk's work was too petty for Astor's inspection, no bit of gossip along the waterfront or at Tontine's Coffee House left unweighed. But he had driven himself too ruthlessly in the service of Mammon to escape the physical consequences. His body cried out at hastening infirmities. Somebody must be found to carry on the routine while he planned grand strategy and obeyed physicians who ordered him abroad for the cure.

So his son was summoned to return from Europe to take his place as lieutenant of the Astor fortune. First he had tried to entice Gallatin to help him, offering a one-fifth interest — worth perhaps twenty thousand dollars a year — in the business. Gallatin declined politely, feeling that " he must not die rich after

holding the posts he had." But Gallatin's son added that the former Secretary of the Treasury could not "place himself on the same level" with the merchant.

After the war Astor had three fleets scouring the seas. One plied between New York and London, Havre, the Baltic, and the Mediterranean, disposing of his furs and China goods, fetching goods for the Indian trade and for China. Another plied between New York and Canton; a third crisscrossed the Pacific, running from Kamchatka to the Northwest coast, to Hawaii, to Russian America, to Canton. After the yoke of Spain was thrown off, the west coast of South America invited his vessels to feed ports starved for a century under the King's monopoly. In 1817 he pioneered by sending off the *Beaver* with a $150,000 cargo for Chile, nor did his resourceful captain hesitate to appeal to the Viceroy still ensconced at Lima when he got in trouble for trading with the revolting republicans.

The springtime of commerce on the Pacific in the early 1800's blossomed not only on the independence of the Latin nations, but on the enslavement of the Hawaiians. Within the span of Astor's life the Sandwich Islands had been discovered, had become the crossroads of the great ocean, and then the seat of the flourishing sandalwood trade. King Kamehameha delighted to find that his domains, bare of furs, silks, teas, or precious stones, had one treasure that could be exchanged for firearms for his armies and cloths for the ladies of his court. He turned sandalwood, which the Chinese treasured, into a royal monopoly, and Astor captains became his favoured protégés. They brought cargoes from New York, New Archangel, and Canton which they sold him more cheaply — because of Astor's pre-eminent position as a merchant — in return for sandalwood. The sunny islanders were turned into forest serfs, hewing and hacking at the King's only merchantable wealth. The King's successor, not too wise, found himself indebted to the traders to the tune of $150,000. He decreed a sandalwood tax on his chiefs. When it was paid, the sandalwood was gone and the islands were abandoned to the missionaries. That dampened Astor's interest in the Pacific.

Ever since the war he had practically monopolized the Canton

fur market. No one else could match his great merchandising organization, meet his prices, offer such advantageous terms to the hong merchants. And there were sly profits on the side, in his opium traffic. In that he pioneered, too. His Mediterranean ships picked up the stuff at Smyrna; the "foreign mud" could be unloaded in the dark of night on waiting sampans in the Pearl River, and they could scamper away to safety while Chinese guards dozed on the wharves. As late as 1832 Astor was writing a Constantinople merchant to "please send returns in Opium" for a consignment of fifteen hundred red-fox skins.

But his first love was furs. To be sure, it was his China argosies that dumped wealth at his feet and dazzled the eyes of his contemporaries as he advanced toward the position of America's wealthiest citizen. The immense profits of his China trade he might bury in the purchase of Manhattan acres or in adding to his fleet, but the base of his wealth remained in the fur trade he plied in the interior.

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"It is a trade by which I have lost money," he confided to a friend with his customary self-deprecation on financial matters, "yet I prefer it to any other & I have not lost my hopes, but that ere long I shall participate to a considerable extent in its goods & its evils." In 1815 he was ready to dust off the incorporation papers of American Fur and put his projected monopoly into operation.

The first move was to have Congress, still burning with anti-British hatred, pass a law barring Canadians from the American fur trade. The second was to use the law to freeze out his Canadian partners in the South West Company which he had organized before the war. That done, he confided his future plans to Robert Stuart, one of the surviving Pacific Fur partners, who relayed it to Ramsay Crooks, manager of the resurrected American Fur Company.

"I . . . have only time to give you the purport of a short tete-a-tete I had with the old Cock this morning Viz: — That he is digesting a very extensive plan for establishing all the Indian Countries within the line demarkation between G.B. and the U.S. and the probability is that a considerable time may elapse before that object can be brought to full maturity, as he wants

an exclusive grant or privilege . . . you can very readily draw your own conclusions regarding his views, which I really believe are as friendly toward us all, as his own *dear* interest will permit, for of that you are no doubt aware, he will never loose sight *until some kind friend will put his or her fingers over his eyelids.*"

Having frozen out the Canadians on the profit-taking side of the business, he had now the problem of getting wage-taking Canadians to work for him. Fortunately the law had the needed loophole: the President could license Canadian workmen if the public interest required it. Monroe was the President. Ramsay Crooks, Astor's ace lobbyist, put the case this way:

"The Canadian Boatmen . . . are indispensable to the successful prosecution of the trade, their places cannot be supplied by Americans, who are for the most part too independent to submit quietly to proper controul, and who can gain any where a subsistence much Superior to a Man of the interior and although the body of the Yankee can resist as much hardship as any Man, tis only in the Canadian we find that temper of mind to render him patient docile and persevering in short they are a people harmless in themselves whose habits of submission fit them peculiarly for our business and if guided as it is my wish they should be, will never give just cause of alarm to the Government of the Union. It is of course your object to exclude every foreigner except those for whom you obtain licenses."

President Monroe could not personally be granting licences. He delegated the authority to the Secretary of War, who was in charge of the Indian country, who delegated it to Governor Lewis Cass of Michigan Territory and to the Indian agents at Mackinac, Chicago, and Green Bay. The Secretary instructed them to grant "every aid and facility" to American Fur Company traders in licensing Canadians. If Joe Canuck was to work on this side of the border, it would be obviously only by permission of old man Astor, behind-the-scenes boss of the frontier.

Indian Agent Puthuff at Mackinac objected to licensing Canadians who had been in the "British Indian Department during the War." He wrote Governor Cass:

"I wish to god the President knew this man Astor as well as he is known here. Licenses would not be placed at his discretion

to be distributed among British subjects, Agents or Pensioners. I hope in god no such license will be granted, his British Friends here calculate confident on his success in this matter, that they may be disappointed is my most sincere wish, should they succeed incalculable evil will assuredly grow out of the measure."

A reported transaction involving thirty-five thousand dollars has haunted historians delving into the relations between Astor and Governor Cass. With tantalizing mystery the record has been reported to have been seen — and has disappeared. The ethical factor is not material in accounting for favours showered upon Astor. He was the friend of presidents, the wealthiest merchant of New York, the head of the overweening corporation of the back country. Moreover, a good patriotic defence could be made for concessions given American Fur. The Canadian trade was under the control of only two corporations; an American corporation of similar magnitude was needed to hold the Canadians in check on their side of the border and to command the allegiance of the Indians on this side.

Major Puthuff was instructed by Governor Cass to license all Astor traders and to grant as few licences to others as possible. He protested and was removed. Independent companies quailed in the face of American Fur. Ramsay Crooks, Astor's lieutenant, reported that one competitor "has quitted the trade," another "is crippled and D. Stone & Co. appear wavering."

One obstacle to monopoly still remained — the government trading posts. These had been created in 1796, not so much for humanitarian reasons as to bring the Indian into friendlier relations with the whites and thus to shield the frontier settlers. The practices of the private traders were apt to turn the Indian into the mortal enemy of all Americans.

American Fur undercut the government posts. Its agents cheerfully sold rum and whisky, which could not be obtained at the posts, and its Canadian employees inflamed the Indians' hatred of all things American. In time most of the government posts were reduced to inactivity. Astor then carried the battle to Washington: the posts had failed, had degenerated into mere sinecures. Governor Cass was eloquent in Astor's behalf. Secre-

tary of War Crawford was about to recommend that Congress abolish the system when Thomas L. McKenney, superintendent of the Indian trade, swung him over to the point of asking larger appropriations so that the posts could do their job effectively.

That was the signal for Son-in-law Bentzon to dash to Washington to open headquarters in Brown's Hotel. Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, spokesman for the trans-Mississippi fur interests and attorney for American Fur, declaimed in favour of free enterprise. The government trading posts went down in 1822. Crooks wrote Senator Benton enthusiastically:

"You deserve the unqualified thanks of the Community for destroying the pious monster . . . the country is indebted to you for its deliverance from so gross and holy an imposition."

"Thus," observed Chittenden, historian of the Western fur trade, "ended in failure a system fraught with possibilities of great good to the Indian — a system which if followed out as it should have been, would have led the Indian to his new destiny by easy stages and would have averted the long and bloody wars, the corruption and bad faith, which have gained for a hundred years of our dealings with the Indians the unenviable distinction of a 'century of dishonor.'"

Astor himself was in Paris during the Congressional battle over the trading posts. His health somewhat broken by too devoted service before the altar of Mammon, his son fully able to carry on the mercantile firm of J. J. Astor & Son while Ramsay Crooks superintended the fur trade, he decided that he had earned a respite after thirty-five years of grinding toil. The retired magnate did Paris, Geneva, Rome, Naples, keeping President Monroe informed that "all Europe is threanstend with Revolution," that "those in Powe are trimbling." He revisited Germany, doubtless to visit his parents' graves in Waldorf and to see his brother, Melchior, the only one who had remained.

The winter he spent agreeably in Paris, where his old friend Gallatin was Minister at the court of Louis XVIII. Gallatin's son wrote an unflattering picture:

"Really Mr. Astor is dreadful. Father has to be civil to him, as in 1812–13 he rendered great service to the Treasury. He came to *dejeuner* today; we were simply *en famille,* he sitting

next to Frances [young Gallatin's sister]. He actually wiped his fingers on the sleeves of her fresh white spencer. Mamma in discreet tones said, 'Oh, Mr. Astor, I must apologize; they have forgotten to give you a serviette.' I think he felt foolish."

In 1822 he returned to America to supervise a cherished project — to push monopoly west of the Mississippi. A branch was opened in St. Louis, a competing company was absorbed, and control of the Mississippi and lower Missouri accomplished. Ramsay Crooks, Astor's chief partner and agent, then moved up the Missouri to absorb Columbia Fur, which did "an annual injury of $10,000 at least." Crooks speculated at first on taking over Kenneth McKenzie, "the sole of his concern," and finally closed by taking in all the Columbia Fur partners to "annihilate their opposition entirely."

Opposition still lingered in Wisconsin among hardy rugged individualists. First the Green Bay men were forced to buy their supplies from American Fur under threat of competition. But the prices charged on Indian goods turned out to be so high that the traders lost money. Then American Fur organized them into the Green Bay Company, a subsidiary, and competition vanished.

In bending competitors to his will, Astor was supple. Crush the weak, take over the more efficient of the vanquished as employees or traders on shares, absorb strong rival groups — these were his guiding principles. Once control was secured, he complained bitterly against the productivity of his organization. Always too many furs were being bought. The markets were being flooded. Retrenchment was the eternal refrain of his commands to American Fur's partners and agents.

Captains and agents abroad kept their fingers on the pulse of demand and their reports were sifted through Astor's mind. His aim was to control the market by buying up all available supplies of furs much in demand and then to feed them out carefully.

By the 1830's no powerful group contested his supremacy in Michigan and Wisconsin, along the tributaries of the lower Mississippi, or along the Missouri. In return for a free hand on the upper Missouri he had relinquished the Rocky Mountain area.

His position in the Canton fur market amounted practically to a monopoly, for no other merchant could match him there. In London he held a commanding position, contested only by the Hudson's Bay Company.

Still Astor was dissatisfied. "The business is bad under an opposition," he wrote, "and indeed not very good with it." His partners were reminded that the market was bad, there were too many furs, the company was losing money. The partners, it seemed, were in no danger of becoming millionaires themselves. The secret may have been locked in two sets of books, one for American Fur, which collected the furs, the other for J. J. Astor & Son, which sold them. American Fur declared no dividend until 1830, but every Astor ship leaving New York carried a rich cargo, and every returning ship carried goods for the Indian country, sold at substantial profit to American Fur and its tolerated competitors.

The reports from New York on sales were astounding. On one day 550,000 muskrat skins were sold and 200,000 remained. Buyers flocked from Europe to attend Astor's spring and autumn auctions. The Great Lakes country continued to yield muskrat in abundance, but it was to the upper Missouri and the Yellowstone that Astor must look for precious beaver. He could not rely on the untamed Plains Indians to do all his fur-trapping; for that he needed the white trappers, a hard lot almost as wild as the Indians, more at home in Jackson's Hole than in St. Louis, happy in the bivouac, the untamed rugged individualists of the frontier who must nevertheless be broken into Astor harness.

It was a wild fierce struggle, to be won, as Pierre Chouteau, Jr., Astor's lieutenant, put it, "*coûte que coûte.*" "*Écrasez toute opposition,*" he ordered. Fortified posts were pushed far into the country of the Sioux and Blackfeet, first at the mouth of the Yellowstone, then at the Big Horn where American Fur men gratefully named their post for Lewis Cass, one-time Governor of Michigan, now Secretary of War.

Kenneth McKenzie, head of Astor's Upper Missouri Outfit, brought the first steamboat up the Missouri to Fort Union, where the Yellowstone debouched. The Indians were frightened, amazed, and then delighted at this mysterious giant that walked

up the river smoking. American Fur's prestige climbed. McKenzie then struck off medals bearing the features of John Jacob Astor to match Hudson's Bay's medals of the King. So there were two Kings, mused the Indian chiefs, the British King and the one who owned the smoking boat.

More than medals was needed to beat Hudson's Bay Company, which drenched the frontier with liquor. "Without ardent spirits, competition is hopeless," Astor complained.

"The duplicity and crime for which this unhallowed traffic is responsible in our relations with the Indians," said Chittenden, "has been equalled but seldom in even the most corrupt nations."

Chief Pokagon described the business at Mackinac, where five thousand gallons were handled in one year:

"'Let me tell you some things I have seen at some of our trading posts; even Mackinaw, where Astor got rich and we very poor. The most profitable trade and the most ruinous trade Mackinaw ever had was in whiskey.' He then gave the formula . . . used on Mackinaw Island 1817–18, for making whiskey for the Indians. Actual cost not to exceed five cents a gallon and retailed to the Indians for fifty cents a bottle, of which thousands of bottles were sold every year. . . . Take two gallons of common whiskey or unrectified spirits, add to thirty gallons of water and to this add red pepper enough to make it fiery and tobacco enough to make it intoxicating, and you have a decation that will cause the Indian to give everything he possesses into the hands of the white man."

As late as 1822 Army officers were still asking Washington for instructions in stopping the flow of liquor. What, for example, was Indian country? Obviously Astor's Green Bay post was outside, Governor Cass ruled. And could white men be deprived of liquor rations? Obviously not. A third loophole: traders could barter liquor for needed food supplies. A fourth: liquor must not be sold to Indians, but there was no provision against giving it away.

Astor could plead in self-defence that he was in a business but slightly influenced by trade morality even of the mildest sort. The man who used liquor got the business. The alternative was

to stay out. He preferred, as he said, to "participate to a considerable extent in its good & its evils." If he didn't, others would.

Humour lighted dark corners. Robert Stuart, the partner in charge of Mackinac, got religion in 1828 and found himself trapped by his conscience. Should a Presbyterian elder sell whisky to the Indians? A knotty problem. No whisky, no furs. No furs, no partnership with Astor. What to do? He compromised by continuing to sell whisky, but forbade his employees to work on Sunday.

Kenneth McKenzie on the upper Missouri had to have liquor to meet Hudson's Bay competition. Thousands of gallons came up the river. A competitor told the Secretary of War that American Fur agents "entertain, as I know to be the fact, no sort of respect for our citizens, agents, officers or the Government, or its laws or general policy."

A new bone-dry bill was pushed in Washington. Astor appealed to Congressman Ashley, a pioneer in the fur trade: "If the Hudson's Bay Company did not employ ardent spirits against us, we would not ask for a single drop. But without it competition is hopeless." Barring English competition, he assured Ashley, "the uniform and complete enforcement of such a law will be beneficial both to the Indians and the traders."

Very likely that was his honest sentiment. Astor took no pleasure in contemplating the ravages of liquor among the Indians. But always it was the competition of other traders and now of the powerful Canadian monopoly that forced him to deal in the stuff.

The law went through. Resourceful McKenzie at the mouth of the Yellowstone set up a still. Scandal followed when a jealous competitor informed Washington. Andrew Jackson, less complacent than Monroe and Adams, threatened to revoke American Fur's licence. Astor's defence was disarming. The still had been ordered by a Canadian across the border. When it was unloaded at Fort Union, McKenzie was seized with scientific curiosity about making wine from the wild fruits and berries of the region. He did not know it was illegal to set up a still. Had not Lewis Cass been Secretary of War, the incident might

well have ended the company's career in the upper Missouri.

Astor's monopoly bred bitterness among the whites while it spread desolation among the Indians. The traders, independent spirits of the frontier who fled civilization for a variety of reasons, stood between American Fur and the Indians. They bought their supplies — food, blankets, guns, whisky, powder, trinkets for the trade — from the company at mark-ups as high as a hundred per cent. William Johnston, son of an American Fur Company trader, grandson of an Ojibway chief, and brother-in-law of a government Indian agent, testified:

"At these exorbitant charges, the traders were through necessity compelled to take the merchandize, the consequence was, and is still; that for them to pay for the goods, and barely to obtain a livelihood; they are in part compelled to use fraud and deceit towards the men they have in their employ; but the whole weight of this extortion, fraud and deceit falls on the poor Indians . . . [of the baneful effects] first to the Indians in keeping them destitute from any moral good . . . in place of it they have been taught to practice fraud and deceit, in fact all the vices of the whites they have imbibed; and to crown the efforts of the trader, to cheat them more completely he brings to his aid ardent Spirits . . . which has sent more to the grave . . . then all the wars they have waged with the whites, or among themselves, even sickness and decease added to it."

Many traders, indebted to the company for goods, gave mortgages on their lands and lost them in due time through foreclosure. There was unanimity on the plight of the trader, for Astor himself admitted "that all our Indian traders . . . with very few exceptions, have been losing time and property in that trade."

Pierre Le Count, who lingered late in the nineteenth century as the "last of the red-shirted, buckskin-breeched traders" of Green Bay, believed for a time that the trouble with American Fur was that Astor did not know what was going on out west. Astor agents, he said, were forever cutting prices, complaining that the beaver had been caught too early to have the finest natural gloss, that the otter skin had been taken from an animal drowned too long in the water, that the minks were all kits.

In 1828 or so he bundled his furs together and set out for New York. He found that Astor lived in a big house on Broadway where the butler, a personage new in Pierre's life, told him that the master was out. Le Count sat down on the steps to wait. After three hours he pulled the knocker again. The butler, much surprised to see this apparition from the backwoods at the door again, informed him that Astor would never come home for the likes of him.

Pierre sat and waited another hour, and then the town watchman came along and inquired his business. "And then he explained some things to me," Le Count said years later, "which set me agin Astor forever more and I just packed up my furs and started back for Fort Dearborn and sold my furs there, but not to Astor's man. I never dealt with Jake Astor again."

Le Count's story may mean little, but it was true, as Chittenden said, that "the American Fur Company was thoroughly hated even by its own servants. Throughout its career it was an object of popular execration, as all grasping monopolies are. Many are the stories, largely exaggerated, no doubt, that have come down to us of its hard and cruel ways. Small traders stood no show whatever and the most desperate measures were resorted to without scruple to get them out of the way. Many an employee, it is said, who had finished his term of service and had started for St. Louis with a letter of credit for his pay fell by the way and was reported as killed by the Indians."

Zachary Taylor, who won his spurs on the upper Mississippi and knew at first hand of the Astor practices, passed his final judgment years later:

"Take the American Fur Company in the aggregate, and they are the greatest scoundrels the world ever knew."

CHAPTER *iv*

Landlord of New York

THREESCORE and ten, John Jacob Astor decided in 1833 that the time had come for him to retire. For years in Paris and Geneva he had nursed a body racked with pain. In 1832 he went abroad the last time to seek repair; just as wretched, he returned. His one-time China captain, De Peyster, commander now of a packet, was witness to the old man's pitiable condition.

"I give you tousand dollars to put me aboard a pilot-boat," he pleaded as the ship beat in vain to get out of the Channel. Stormbound off the Irish coast, he promised De Peyster ten thousand dollars to be put ashore, offering him a note in a scrawl so miserable as to be illegible. The old sea captain, remembering Astor's sharp ways, refused to accept the note. Later off the Grand Banks while De Peyster was hailing a passing vessel, Astor shouted up: "Tell dem I give tousand dollars if dey take a passenger."

To the trials of a hard voyage was added the shock, on landing, of hearing that Sarah, his wife, had just been buried. During his absence Magdalen, his oldest daughter, his brother Henry, a favourite granddaughter Sarah, and a half-sister Elizabeth had died.

His old friend Philip Hone observed a few weeks later that Astor "appears feeble and sickly, and I have some doubt that he will live to witness the completion of his splendid edifice." That edifice was the Astor House, the city's most magnificent hotel, symbol of the city's amazing growth.

The Erie Canal had just been dug, opening an avenue be-

tween New York and the West. Men were clamouring at Astor's door for the use of his farm acres for building-lots. The quarter-million population which brazen optimists had predicted for 1850 was a fact in 1834. Even old Astor, far-sighted as he was in uncanny land-purchases, must have been astounded to see the city striding so rapidly along narrow Manhattan, closing in around his farms, begging him to set his own terms. The income from American Fur and J. J. Astor & Son was dwarfed by the flood of gold and silver his rent-collectors bore him weekly. And it was effortless! No scheming against competitors, no haggling with hesitant buyers, no worries about changing markets and fashions in furs or the fate of ships upon stormy seas. Men were eager to sign twenty-one-year leases for Astor lots, eager to pay the taxes and assessments on the land and to build their own buildings, if only he would sign his name.

It made all the fuss and bother of his fur-trading and mercantile firms seem rather pointless to a sick old man. If his son wished to continue . . . But William Backhouse Astor had not the slightest wish. A solid, substantial fellow, excellent at office routine but without a spark of his father's genius, William was glad to be rid of both firms.

So American Fur was sold in 1834. The first business monopoly in American history, the creation of fifty years of nerve-straining contriving, was divided into two parts: the Western division was sold to Pratte, Chouteau & Company of St. Louis, the Northern department to Ramsay Crooks, the monopoly's manager, and his associates.

Astor sold at the right moment. Beavers were going out of style for gentlemen's headgear; the Rocky Mountain trappers and traders had never been corralled within monopoly's bounds; and, most important, the wilderness had been pillaged of its choicest treasures within a short fifty years. Astor was willing to sell. The merchandising firm of J. J. Astor & Son necessarily went into the discard, and the Astors, *père et fils*, by 1835 became landlords pure and simple.

Amazing business organizer that he was — the first successful grand-scale monopolist in American history — it is doubtful whether Astor made as much money in merchandising as did,

for example, Stephen Girard. A careful estimate by Kenneth Porter put his winnings from American Fur at something under two million dollars. Girard, George Peabody, Thomas Handasyd Perkins, and a half-dozen other merchants of his time made more. A national monopolist, he was unable to control his ablest competitor, Hudson's Bay Company of Canada. And so he complained incessantly of the glut on the London market. Although furs stood at the base of his towering hoard, it was the conversion of profits from his China ships into Manhattan acreage that was destined to make him and his descendants for generations the wealthiest Americans.

Typical merchant Mæcenas of his time, Astor took little interest in manufacturing and paid only incidental attention to finance. A man who was making his fortune from international trade was not encouraging the piddling factories of New England. Old England was the world's factory, and Astor paid for its goods with furs. He put a little money in an upstate cotton mill, but that was all.

Acutely concerned, after the War of 1812, over sound money and banking, he lobbied for the new National Bank and became one of its five national directors as well as first president of the New York branch. When promoters in 1829 secured a state bank charter but were unable to swing capital to it, he agreed to subscribe heavily on condition that his old friend Albert Gallatin be made president, and the bank became known in later years as the Gallatin National Bank.

Transportation, however, was a vital matter for a merchant, and Astor was a founder of the little Mohawk & Hudson, precursor of the New York Central. Many of its early directors' meetings were held in his home, and he busied himself with buying ties and road-bed supplies, selling stock, and getting his friend appointed manager. "What," he wrote an associate upstate, "will be Done about the Rail Road will your pepol of Schencetady give them what Land thy may want as an Inducement no Doubt it will benefit Schenectady. I Trust it will go on provited we can get money anoph to go on with & that those who will be benefited by it will act with liberality."

Canals, too, interested him. In 1826 he took a million dollars

in Ohio Canal Loan six-per-cent stock and also invested in trans-Jersey canal and railroad schemes. In later years he held some two million dollars in state loans — half of it in Ohio as the result of a reorganization in Ohio tax laws forced through the Legislature by himself and Wall Street financiers.

But to the man whose rent-rolls fetched him $27,000 in 1826 and $36,000 in 1831, banking, manufacturing, even fur-trading, were worrisome businesses. Indeed, the greatest inconvenience he had ever been put to as a landlord was in waiting for an old lady to die. She was Mary Philipse, who, it was said, had rejected the suit of a certain Colonel Washington of Virginia in order to marry a British major, Roger Morris. Loyal to the King, Morris and his family fled to England at the end of the Revolutionary War. New York confiscated his lands and sold them to their peasant tillers.

Some years later it was discovered that Mary Philipse Morris held only a life estate in her confiscated lands. The Legislature, then, had sold land that would rightfully belong, on her death, to her three children. The enterprising lawyer who turned up this news, sometimes identified as Aaron Burr, informed the one man in New York whose nose twitched at land bargains and whose purse held $100,000 (just acquired from the proceeds of the mandarin hoax) to pay the heirs for their rights in the estate.

Now all Astor had to do was wait for the widow, seventy years old, to die. Impatient to realize on his bargain, he decided to ask the Legislature to buy the land that would surely be his in the near future. As that would seem a bald proposition to come from a wealthy landlord, he sold a minor interest to other gentlemen and then pressed his claim as representative of all the owners.

Albany was embarrassed. A fierce anti-rent agitation aimed at feudal remnants of the patroon system was sweeping the farm country; in addition the Legislature could not bear to think of paying Astor and the others $300,000. So his burning proposition was shelved.

Astor waited, noting some years later that "the life of Mrs. Morris is, according to calculations, worth little or nothing, she being nearly 86 years of age." His impatience was matched by

that of hapless farmers on the Morris lands who could not sell nor lease nor draw up wills in the uncertainty.

Perhaps the Widow Morris was the only individual who enjoyed the spectacle. But even she tired of life at last and died in 1825 at the ripe age of ninety-six, and her lands became Astor's. Now the Legislature had to act or Astor would be evicting squatters from his land. It was agreed that he should receive $450,000 in five-per-cent state stock if the courts upheld his claim. Astor took up residence in Hoboken so he could sue. The test case was tried in 1827, with New York's ablest counsel at the Astor table, and Martin Van Buren and Daniel Webster pleading for the state. Webster summed up:

" It is a claim for lands not in their wild and forest state, but for lands the intrinsic value of which is mingled with the labor expended upon them. It is no every day purchase, for it extends over towns and counties and almost takes in a degree of latitude. It is a stupendous speculation. The individual who now claims it has not succeeded to it by inheritance; he has not attained it, as he did that vast wealth which no one envies him less than I do, by fair and honest exertions in commercial enterprise, but by speculation, by purchasing the forlorn hope of the heirs of a family driven from their country by a bill of attainder. By the defendants, on the contrary, the lands in question are held as a patrimony. They have labored for years to improve them. The rugged hills had grown green under their cultivation before a question was raised as to the integrity of their titles."

Astor counsel brushed aside such sentimentalism: " Mr. Astor bought this property confiding in the justice of the State of New York, firmly believing that in the litigation of his claim his right would be maintained."

Legal justice triumphed and land reformers fumed. Edmond Charles Genêt, " Citizen " Genêt, who had lost property in New York City to Astor on foreclosure, cried to high heaven that the grasping landlord had no legal right to the land and that there was something rotten in the courts and at Albany. But Albany capitulated and handed over $520,000 in five-per-cent stock, to be known for years as the " Astor stock."

Never the man to show public elation over his triumphs, Astor

remarked dryly: "I had much trouble and little profit by this transaction, though people think I made a fortune by it." He grumbled that interest was being paid on the first Monday instead of the first day of each quarter. But whatever the exact day, he and his heirs were to receive every third month $6,500, or $26,000 a year on an original investment of $100,000.

Citizen Genêt's outburst against the Putnam land deal was coloured by his own experiences. After the death of his father-in-law, Vice President George Clinton, he mortgaged some of the Clinton real estate to Astor, whose money-lending was pretty well confined to that excellent security. Three years later Astor foreclosed and continued to follow the misfortunes of the Clinton and Genêt families until he had invested more than $100,000. This, together with the purchases from Burr and Trinity, accounted for more than half the $715,000 Astor sank in Manhattan realty from 1800 to 1820. The favourite twenty-one-year lease placed taxes and assessments on the lessee, who usually built a two-story dwelling house, often financed by an Astor mortgage. When the twenty-one years were up, the building reverted to Astor, cost-free, or the builder had ten days in which to remove it, or a neutral committee set a price.

When in the 1830's New York became a boom city, he who had announced the policy: "Buy de acre, sell de lot," began to hold on to everything. But he did not believe in building. His most noteworthy venture in that direction, the Astor House, was perhaps the result of the same vanity that found expression in descendants sixty years later who built the Waldorf-Astoria and the Astor.

His Astor House was the marvel of the age. Towering six stories into the air, it boasted three hundred rooms and seventeen bathrooms, black walnut instead of the inevitable mahogany, a marvellous electrical device for signalling rooms, keys on the doors, a bowl and pitcher in every room, and free soap. Some feared the results of enervating luxury; others loved to loiter in the lounge to see "highly dressed ladies reposing on satin couches or lolling in rocking chairs." Its corridors, forerunner of Peacock Alley in the Waldorf-Astoria, were "every whit as elegantly furnished as the rooms" and were "jocularly spoken of as

'the flirtation galleries.'" The desk clerk had an ingenious pigeonhole arrangement for keys and letters, an attendant was always on duty to take hats and coats, another to brush shoes, a barber waited in a shop off the lobby. To visiting Britishers the Astor House called for encomiums on America's "comfort civilization."

For a generation this hotel was the social and political centre of the city. Presidents and would-be presidents, foreign dignitaries, and luminaries of the stage, press, and platform, Clay, Scott, Webster, Choate, Stephen Douglas, Jeff Davis, Lincoln, Thurlow Weed, the Prince of Wales, Greeley, Jenny Lind, Black Hawk, the Grand Duke Alexis, Thackeray, Kossuth, Edwin Forrest, Walt Whitman — all knew its hospitality.

Philip Hone spoke of it as a "Palais Royal" which "for centuries to come will serve as a monument, as it is probably intended, to its wealthy proprietor." It did so serve — for eighty years. As New York rated monuments, that was centuries indeed. By the time it was demolished the Astor House was being compared with Independence and Faneuil Halls.

The hotel was rented to a concessionaire first for $20,500 a year and then for $30,000. That, with the Park Theatre, which brought in $13,000 to $16,000 a year, were the only sizable buildings with which Astor's name was associated.

The panic of 1837 stirred his lethargic juices. He appeared in sixty foreclosures. For $2,000 he got a block in Harlem said to be worth $1,000,000. An East Side radish patch which was to be the site of Astor slums he got for $20,000. In 1838, as the panic deepened, he invested $224,000 in this distressed market. Nearly a century later, at the bottom of another catastrophe, Astor's action was held up as a shining example by a former president of the Real Estate Board of New York. "He was not afraid to acquire property because the other fellow was forced to sell," said this latter-day realtor. "Indeed, at one foreclosure sale he bought a number of lots at so low a figure that the Court of Chancery subsequently made him pay an additional sum because the price he got the property for was so ridiculously low." So extreme became the plight of mortgagers that the Legislature stepped in to temper the wind to the shorn lambs in 1838 by

allowing a year for redemption — with interest at ten per cent.

But Astor was not a man without heart. When the panic threatened to overwhelm Gerrit Smith, son of an old associate, Astor lent him $200,000 at seven per cent. His action underlined a broad tolerance, for Gerrit Smith was a foremost agitator for land reform, temperance, and abolition. Appealing to his saviour to bar rum from the Astor House, he was told: "I admire much your ideas on the subject of temperance; but I fear our folk here are not good enough to admit the introduction at the Hotel I am building of the temperance principles."

By 1840 the man who was becoming the "Landlord of New York" held 355 pieces of property from which he gathered $128,000; by 1848 his rent-roll from 470 leases topped $200,000. And even then much of his land lay unused.

Such concentration aroused hostility among the disciples of Gerrit Smith and the land reformers. Horace Greeley voiced their feeling that "land speculators like Mr. A. should be checked in their dealings in the lands and lots of the country by a statute forbidding any man from holding or acquiring hereafter more than 600 or a thousand acres, or a certain quantity within the city. . . . Mr. Astor is not to blame for grasping at that which neither he nor his son can enjoy — the law made it right for him to do so. The Nationals [Land Reformers] are also fond of direct taxation and are not easily persuaded that it is a wise and just policy in the U. S. Government to protect Mr. Astor's houses, lands, ships, stocks, etc., and yet exact no direct tax from him according to his income."

Astor didn't agree with such nonsense. Asked if he had too much real estate, he answered: "Could I begin life again, knowing what I know now, and had money to invest, I would buy every foot of land on the Island of Manhattan."

Vain regrets! By 1835 he was the wealthiest man in the New World and year by year he became even wealthier without the least effort on his part. Indeed, he could now die, and his descendants could sleep for a hundred years, and still the House of Astor, founded on the rock of Manhattan, would prevail against all enemies. And yet at times he complained because his rare foresight was a bit weaker than his mature hindsight,

because he did not have even more the courage of his conviction that houses would one day cover the nondescript goat farms, marshes, and granite-ribbed hills he saw on his horseback saunters out into the green fields of mid-Manhattan.

In all he invested two million dollars in the island. The first million represented, roughly, the profits of his China trade; the second came from rents, leases, and sales of land.

The House of Astor! That was his concern now. His hopes rested on the issue of his son William Backhouse and Margaret Rebecca Armstrong. A rough plebeian self-converted into a Mæcenas, Astor saw to it that his son married into the aristocracy. It was a measure of his high financial rank that he was able in 1818 to unite his heir with a daughter of the Revolutionary Armstrongs and the pre-Revolutionary Livingstons. To old Astor's joy, she gave her husband three boys, John Jacob III, William B., Jr., and Henry. He delighted in showering gifts upon them. His namesake particularly, a sober young fellow who fitted into the harness without demur, was the favourite of the man who was already planning to outwit New World laws against primogeniture and entail.

In the twilight of his life Astor loved to watch the Boston boat go through Hellgate in the evening and to see the lights come up in Astoria, the village across the East River, named in honour of his Oregon settlement in the hope — quite useless, it turned out — that he might contribute a public building to the Queens County community. The memory of his own Astoria on the Pacific coast rankled within him as the one defeat of his life. Now he hoped to clutch immortality by a heroic story of that enterprise, to be told by that prince of story-tellers, his friend Washington Irving. He preferred to be known to history rather as the dreamer of a glorious exploit that failed than as the successful builder of the nation's first monopoly or merely a grasping landlord.

Irving, America's foremost man of letters, distinguished as a writer of romanticized history, had just returned from seventeen years in Spain and France. He rediscovered his native land with enthusiasm, travelled on the Great Plains, and wrote in his *Tour on the Prairies* of the Indian and hunter culture being snuffed

out by advancing civilization. He was already half-persuaded when Astor, whom he had known well in Paris, begged him to consider the theme of the first American venture to conquer the Northwest coast.

Documents, salary for an assistant, lodging at Hellgate were Irving's. In 1835 he was hard at work. Astor, he wrote, " is doing everything in his power to render our residence with him agreeable, he takes the true way, by leaving us completely masters of ourselves and our time."

Astoria, published in 1836, was the literary success of the year. " It is a fascinating book," said young Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. " The remarkable form of John Jacob stands out like a statue of granite. A sublime enterprise."

The verdict Astor had hoped for.

The *Westminster Review,* " spellbound," declared that " the plain merchant assumes almost the character of the founder of an empire and his enterprise appears a great scheme for the aggrandizement of a nation rather than a private mercantile operation to increase his own fortune."

The *American Quarterly Review* worshipped this master of commerce: " From an obscure stranger he has made himself one of the ' celebrities " of the country. . . . Working thus with noiseless machinery but with untiring vigor, he has comprehended the ends of the earth in his schemes and filled them with his agents and made them acquainted with his name. Nations have taken cognizance of his individual enterprises, statesmen have studied them and labored to favor or thwart them and among them was one at least as this book proves whose failure was a general misfortune of mankind."

It was as if he were privileged, as was his great-grandson William Waldorf, to read his own obituaries.

As the aging man shelved the responsibilities of business, his active mind turned for companionship to that nimble-witted belletrist Fitz-Greene Halleck. The literary world belaboured Astor

> To think that e'en a millionaire
> Should have withal the hard assurance
> To hold a Son of Song in durance,

but Halleck prized his $5,000-a-year salary as secretary and companion to Dives far above the slender income he had gained from his verse.

Halleck once rallied his master on the futility of gaining more wealth than he could ever hope to use. "Mr. Astor," he asked, "of what use is all this money to you? I would be content to live upon a couple of hundreds a year for the rest of my life, if I was only sure of it."

Astor, intent on a final joke, inserted a $200 annuity for Halleck in his will. When the clause was made public after Astor's death, littérateurs, bubbling over in wrath, advised the poet to reject it. But apparently William B. had been in on the joke, for he increased the annuity to $1,500.

As his body dissolved, the old man turned for solace to the sober savant Joseph Green Cogswell, his "train-bearer and prime minister," who read to him when his eyes failed, discussed with him the life, if any, which lay beyond the grave, and agitated for a library to be endowed with Astor money.

Although he was wealthier than he knew, what with Manhattan realty values bursting through every predicted maximum, old Astor was chary of libraries or any other charity. To him, "want and fault were synonymous." To a begging person he conceded that "the disposition to do good does not always increase with the means." On one occasion he coldly rejected a charity appeal on the ground he had no money. Halleck offered to endorse his note for a few hundred dollars. Ever willing to enjoy a good joke, he gave in. To a petitioner for funds for Greek independence Astor confided that he was really quite poor. "Yes, Mr. Astor, everyone is poor nowadays but you and me," his visitor replied. Astor gave.

Many were the immigrants who claimed to come from Waldorf. To one such Astor gave a five-dollar bill. "Why," said the discontented fellow, "your son just gave me ten dollars." "Well he may," remarked the old man, "the dog has a rich father."

If great benefactions conferred by the wealthy show a "rudimentary social consciousness, the beginning of a guilt feeling," certainly Astor enjoyed an extraordinarily easy conscience. Thoughts of liquor-crazed Indians, of broken traders and en-

gagés, of opium-doped Chinese, of Hawaiians turned by his sandalwood trade from carefree islanders into wretched serfs, or even of the miserable rent-racked denizens of his tenant houses apparently never disturbed his mercantilist soul.

Cogswell wheedled him into approval of a public library by threatening to accompany Washington Irving to Spain as secretary of the American legation. Philip Hone described the inception of Astor's only major philanthropy:

"But Mr. Cogswell . . . does not go. Mr. Astor, who enjoys his society, has bribed him to remain. He is willing to pay as much for the velvet cushion on which it is his pleasure to rest his head as the secretaryship would have produced, and it comes in the shape of a permanent salary to Mr. Cogswell as librarian of a great public library which Mr. Astor has signified his intention to establish and endow in this city, which he proposes now to anticipate. Cogswell wisely determines to receive his equivalent and stay at home, write articles for the *New York Review* and accompany his patron in his daily drives from Broadway to Hell Gate. Mæcenas keeps Horace with him, and Horace knows when he has a good thing."

Cogswell busied himself with plans for the library building. Casually his employer asked him how much the outlay would be for the first year. About $65,000, he estimated.

"That will do," Astor replied, and arose to place the architect's plans in a trunk, where they rested to the day of his death.

It was to his family that Astor opened his heart and his pocketbook. For "one Spanish milled dollar," he gave his new Astor House to his son William. The City Hotel he gave to his granddaughter, the Baroness Boreel. Lots and houses on exclusive LaFayette Place went to various children and grandchildren so they could be together.

To his grandsons, John Jacob III, William, and Henry, went the land between Forty-second and Fifty-first Streets from Bloomingdale Road (Broadway) to the Hudson, his namesake getting half. Great tracts lying between Eighth Avenue and the river from Fifty-fourth to Fifty-seventh Streets, between Bloomingdale Road and Eighth Avenue from Thirty-seventh to Forti-

eth, and between Third and Fifth Avenues from Fifteenth to Sixteenth Streets he gave to his son and heir.

Stocks and bonds he lavished upon his progeny so that each of them would be independently wealthy before his death. Shrewd in his knowledge of men, he may have wanted none of his descendants to await his death with the intensity that had marked his own preoccupation with the Widow Morris.

Although his frame shook with palsy, his insomnia kept the faithful Cogswell up in the small hours, and gathering infirmities required the attention of ever watchful servants, his mind demanded the companionship of the great of New York — merchants, bankers, politicians, and diplomats — and his invitation was a command.

His house, a four-story brownstone at 485 Broadway just below Houston, was richly furnished with the loot of Europe and the Far East. As a foible, he had Negro, white, and Chinese servants for his Lucullan feasts. These often started with oysters and Moselle and proceeded through boned turkey, filet de bœuf aux champignons, fried oysters, quail and canvasback duck, with the appropriate sherry and Madeira. Silver and gold plate graced these viands, and conversation sparkled as this man of fabulous wealth, keen mind, earthy wit, and intimate knowledge of the world, its affairs and leaders, parried with his guests. While the splendour of his dining-room was not to be compared with that of his illustrious granddaughter-in-law, *the* Mrs. Astor of the Glittering Eighties, certainly there was not a touch of the boredom that marked her stuffy dinners.

To his tenants he was mean and grasping; to his family, an affectionate old gentleman, remembered for the great silver buckles on his shoes, his long grey hair, his many gifts; to his friends, a jovial fellow respected not only for his money but for the calculating, intensely worldly mind that summed up as much practical wisdom as could be found in any American.

Solid and square-built, five feet nine inches in height, with features that grew heavier with age, he made a vivid impression on the mind of Walt Whitman, then a mere youngster, as he saw "a bent feeble but stoutly-built very old man, bearded,

swathed in rich furs, with a great ermine cap on his head, led and assisted, almost carried, down the steps of his high front stoop (a dozen friends and servants, emulous, carefully holding and guiding him) and then lifted and tuck'd in a gorgeous sleigh, envelop'd in other furs, for a ride. The sleigh was drawn by as fine a team of horses as I ever saw. . . . I remember the spirited champing horses, the driver with his whip, and a fellow-driver by his side, for extra prudence. The old man, the subject of so much attention, I can almost see now. It was John Jacob Astor."

While politicians frequented his table, Astor's interest had narrowed from Washington to the tax commissioners of New York. In 1833 he thought it worth while to lend money to the rising young politician Henry Clay, but in 1844 he declined to contribute to Clay's presidential war chest.

"I haven't anything to do with commerce," he explained, business-like, "and it makes no difference to me what the Government does. I don't make money any more, and haven't any concern in this matter."

Some might complain against such pocket-bound patriotism, but the anecdote illustrated one of Astor's redeeming qualities — his disdain of hypocrisy. He knew what he wanted, got it in the most direct way, and preached no homilies. There was not a drop of pious unction in his make-up.

His ally in the Indian office in Washington, McKenney, saw Astor in 1846 and wrote to Dolly Madison:

"Your old friend Mr. Astor is very feeble. He is at Hurl-gate, and may linger on awhile longer, but can have no pleasure in life. I am told by those who know him best that his relish for wealth is as keen as ever; That gone, he is gone."

By 1847 he could no longer shuffle along with his cane and was wheeled about.

"When all else had died within him," wrote a contemporary, "when he was at last nourished like an infant at a woman's breast, and when no longer able to ride in a carriage, he was daily tossed in blanket for exercise, he still retained a strong interest in the care and increase of his property. His agent called daily upon him to render a report of moneys received.

One morning this gentleman chanced to enter his room while he was enjoying his blanket exercise. The old man cried out from the middle of his blanket:

"'Has Mrs. —— paid that rent yet?'

"'No,' replied the agent.

"'Well, but she must pay it,' said the poor old man.

"'Mr. Astor,' rejoined the agent, 'she can't pay it now; she has had misfortunes, and we must give her time.'

"'No, no,' said Astor: 'I tell you she can pay it, and she will pay it. You don't go the right way to work with her.'

"The agent took leave, and mentioned the anxiety of the old gentleman with regard to the unpaid rent to his son, who counted out the requisite sum, and told the agent to give it to the old man as if he had received it from the tenant.

"'There!' exclaimed Mr. Astor when he received the money. 'I told you she would pay it if you went the right way to work with her.'"

The story as told by Parton, Astor's first biographer, was so typical of him that when death came, belatedly, on March 29, 1848, few grieved.

BOOK TWO

WILLIAM B. ASTOR

CHAPTER *i*

The Ideal Heir

A MAN in his own image, fired with ambition, balancing audacity with shrewd caution, keen perception with tireless energy, would have been Astor's ideal heir. Such a son, backed by twenty million dollars, could have dominated the dawning railroad age as his father ruled the mercantile era.

Actually William Backhouse Astor lacked ambition, audacity, perception, energy. Yet he was admirably adapted to sit watching and waiting over his land. Mere brilliance or energy, unless wondrously blended, might have led him to squander the Astor Estate. If impatient of the humdrum routine of landlordism, he might have sold precious acres for other investments. Misgivings as to his right to inherit the greatest hoard in the New World might have led him to give it away. Instead, he just sat in his unpretentious office on Prince Street, counted the rents as they came in, and guarded his patrimony.

"William will never *make* money," said his father, "but he will keep what he has."

Good fortune combined with bad to help John Jacob Astor defy laws against primogeniture. Laborious Sarah bore him four sons; two died in infancy, one was hopelessly insane. There remained only William Backhouse, born September 19, 1792, a month after the death of his namesake. Heavy must have been Astor's debt to that New York merchant for help in his beginning years in the fur trade. Widow Anna Backhouse graciously acted as sponsor for the infant, born in Astor's two-story residence-store-warehouse at 149 Broadway.

The boy had an exhilarating micrometropolis for a playground. An after-school romp could take him to the Battery, where fashion promenaded before the harbour's many-sailed commerce, or down to South Street, where he could watch ships loading casks and bales bearing his father's mark " IIA," or up beyond the Park to the Lispenard Meadows or the Collect Pond.

The heir was sent off to the Reverend Mr. Smith's boarding school in Stamford, where he and scions of the LeRoy, Delafield, Gouverneur, and Roosevelt families were put through a grinding classical regime. Eight years later he had absorbed all the Greek and Latin the indefatigable Reverend Mr. Smith was likely to teach him.

After two years at Heidelberg he switched over to Göttingen where he turned to the aged classicist Christian Gottlob Heyne for advice. That savant, first to apply scientific methods to the examination of Greek mythology, recommended his talented student Christian C. J. Bunsen as tutor. It was a stroke of rare fortune for both, as Bunsen explained to his sister:

" I am now in a very convenient position, residing altogether with the son of an American merchant named Astor, boarded and lodged in the best manner, and am to receive between this time and Easter 30 louis d'or for which I give him instruction in German and other things. My own studies in Latin and Greek are necessarily somewhat interrupted in consequence, but, on the other hand, I have occasion to improve in English, and such a mode of life is in more than one respect useful to me. . . . It is at least a satisfaction that my teachers have chosen me for this post out of the whole mass of students."

Young Astor's English instruction may well have been the determining factor in Bunsen's life, for a few years later he married an English girl and joined his enthusiasm for the Evangelical Church with equal admiration for the Church of England. That peculiar combination endeared him to Frederick William IV and led him to fame as Prussian ambassador to the Court of St. James's.

At Göttingen tutor and student complemented each other. In Astor's apartment Bunsen's friends met to play cards and argue philosophy. One of them was Arthur Schopenhauer, a moody

fellow with a poodle. In the summer of 1811 the companions toured Gotha, Weimar, and Jena and went on to Dresden and Leipzig. Late in 1812 Astor, planning to return to America, was beseeching Bunsen to accompany him. Bunsen informed his startled parents: "As to going to America, pray not be anxious, thither I shall not go as long as Germany exists."

In the spring of 1813 the pair set out for Vienna, Milan, and the Italian lakes, intending to wind up in Paris in the fall. At Frankfurt they learned of the French defeat at Leipzig; all Germany was thrown into an uproar of marching armies. Universities closed, the Rhine became a barrier, no letters could be dispatched across the ocean.

John Jacob Astor was frantic: "William," he wailed, "is no more." One reason he was anxious to get a ship out of blockaded New York was to rescue William; the *Hannibal* duly returned with a rich cargo and Astor's son and heir.

Astor hoped that the young man of twenty-two would buckle down to business in the spring thaw after war's winter. But William's head was full of the dulcet life in Göttingen, his interrupted trip to Italy and France. New York was crude and whatever friends this rather lonely, frigid youngster had had seemed alien to him now. He escaped to Paris for the winter of 1815–16 and in the spring went down to Italy, where Bunsen joined him. Eagerly they sketched plans for an Oriental journey, then all the fashion among the rich young men. Bunsen knew Hebrew and Persian, while Astor had ten thousand dollars a year allowance.

Plans crashed when old Astor suddenly ordered his son to return home without delay. Alas for dreams of Sicily, the Levant, Magna Græcia, for the lore of inscriptions on tombs and temples, for the ruined cities of Turan on the bleached deserts between Persia and Turkestan! Already the weight of the Astor millions was pressing hard on the life of this heir. He would have delighted to spend the rest of his life on the Continent, with subsidized men of letters pleased to furnish agreeable companionship. Amateur dilletante, he could have delved into excavations of the Near East, followed the lectures on literature at the Sorbonne, listened to philosophers debate at Göttingen,

resurrected the glory of old Rome along the Bay of Naples — the life which was to pull many young men of wealth from seaboard America to Europe in the years to come.

Instead, without verve, he climbed a stool in his father's office, inspected bales of furs landed from Albany, checked incoming cargoes against bills of lading, investigated prospective tenants, sat for hours on end translating his father's crude English into neat business letters. Into this routine young Astor settled without demur, for he was his mother's son, saw no escape, and after a few years needed none.

For such a man it is difficult to conceive of romance. He was hardly the kind to go a-courting in the hills and dales of Margaret Rebecca Armstrong's Dutchess County. So the tale that was told that their fathers arranged the match may well have been true, for Margaret was as phlegmatic as William.

Her father, General John Armstrong, was a testy old fellow to whom contentiousness was a way of life. In 1783 he was plaguing Washington with his anonymous Newburgh Addresses, stirring up mutiny; next year he was leading Pennsylvania troops against Connecticut settlers in the Wyoming Valley and treating the conquered so abominably that even the Harrisburg Legislature was revolted. By no means content to settle down as a back-country gentleman and rest on his own and his father's military honours, he moved to New York and married a sister of Chancellor Robert R. Livingston. But not before, according to suspicion, he had written an anonymous "address" against a member of the Livingston family and then asked the Chancellor for a thousand dollars to write an answer to it.

Armstrong, young, keen, ambitious, became a Senator in 1801 and Minister to France three years later, succeeding his brother-in-law. When the War of 1812 broke out, Madison selected Armstrong to head the War Department. After the British burned Washington, the army, practically in mutiny, refused to serve longer under Secretary Armstrong, and Monroe drove him out of the Cabinet.

Blaming Madison's weakness for the debacle, Armstrong retired to his Dutchess County estate, part of the old Livingston acres, where he bred Merinos and set himself to composing

JOHN JACOB ASTOR II (1791-1869)

the first son of the Founder. Born an imbecile, he died childless and unchronicled.

WILLIAM BACKHOUSE ASTOR (1792-1875)

the second son of the Founder. He was admirably fitted to sit watching and waiting over his land, and had not a spark of his father's genius.

Notices of the War of 1812, a bitter document charging Gallatin with treason. The charges involved John Jacob Astor.

Such acrimonious disputes, it must be presumed, did not bother either General Armstrong or Astor in 1818 when, according to a Dutchess County historian, they first proposed the marriage of Margaret Armstrong to the heir of the Astor millions and "made all the essential arrangements for the ceremony, before the young folks had met each other."

The "essential arrangements" must have been submitted to a good bit of cold analysis by both fathers. Armstrong was not loath to have a wealthy son-in-law; Astor for his part did not propose to contribute too much to the enrichment of bluebloods. The prospect that the untimely death of his son might pass one third of the Astor patrimony by dower right into the hands of a Livingston-Armstrong alarmed the merchant who had sunk most of his wealth into Manhattan. And so he dictated a marriage settlement which was to become a model for subsequent generations of the Astors when they married. By this instrument the bride surrendered her dower right for a definite sum, princely to the Armstrongs, but meagre indeed when compared with the Astor hoard.

The marriage of the Astors into the most aristocratic family of New York could not of course be conducted in the rites of either peasant Lutheran or middle-class Reformed Church. Only the Church of the landed gentry, the Episcopalian, could solemnize such a union, and the Astors were willing.

The groom was honoured by his father with junior partnership in the newly created firm of J. J. Astor & Son. Next year his father, reassured that William had settled down into the steady stride of business, departed for Europe, leaving him as regent for the mercantile firm and overseer of American Fur.

Faithful lieutenant, competent confidential super-clerk, he suited his father well enough. John Jacob may well have sighed in vain regret that his son planned little and executed no clever manœuvres on his own, but that mattered less and less as the old man retired gradually from commerce — first from the China trade, and then, in 1834, from American Fur.

By then the younger Astor was independently wealthy,

thanks to Uncle Henry, the butcher and drover, who skipped over all his many nephews who failed to have John Jacob Astor for a father. Acting on the sound Biblical injunction that to him that hath should be given, old Henry Astor, childless, passed on to William an estate variously estimated at from $100,000 to $1,000,000. Most of it was in sound Bowery lots.

A remarkably acquisitive family, these Astors. That John Jacob was no sport off a dull biological tree was proved by Brother George, the prosperous London piano merchant, by Brother Henry, the wealthy drover, and Sister Elizabeth, the masterful distiller. Elizabeth resented all the attention directed at John Jacob and loved to remind people of his lowly origin: " Yakob vas notting put a paker poy, and sold preat und kak."

Henry was as far-seeing, in his way, as John Jacob. Not content with merely butchering and selling meat, he began to meet drovers up the island to buy their herds and profit by disposing of them to fellow butchers, city institutions, and ships — including his brother's. Occasionally he could corner the market, much to the distress of the guild, which protested to the Common Council in 1801. He bought the drovers' headquarters, Bull's Head Tavern out on Bowery Lane.

At least once he was outwitted, and by that ace of sharps, Daniel Drew. Drew was driving a lean and hungry herd to market when he hit upon an excellent dodge: he fed them salt at Williamsbridge and sent on a messenger to Henry to tell him to expect a fine fat herd. At noon his thirsty cattle were watered and a little while later driven into the tavern pens, their bellies puffed out. Henry paid three cents a pound for meat and water, thus originating, according to tradition, a phrase popular in Wall Street: " watered stock."

After an explosion of Astorian wrath, Henry and Dan became good friends. With Henry's money Drew went to Ohio and picked up for a song a thousand cattle which he drove all the way to New York, thus opening up the Western cattle trade and returning a fat profit to himself and his backer.

To celebrate his entry into independent wealth via his uncle's fortune, William Backhouse decided to build fine mansions in city and country befitting his new station in life and his grow-

ing family of six children. For years he had lived on Broadway — Bedlam's own street — near White. How New York had grown since his boyhood! Then the fashionable residential district was around Morris, Rector, Cedar, Cortlandt Streets and the Battery. By the 1830's the aristocracy had moved two miles up the island and settled off Broadway on Broome and Spring and some daring souls had even established themselves around far uptown Washington Square, but recently reclaimed from a potter's field.

Old John Jacob, ever solicitous for his family, joined readily in his son's desire to convert the pleasant Vauxhall Gardens into a choice residential neighbourhood. Here inside a high wooden fence, a half-mile below the junction of Broadway and the Bowery, were bowered walks, an open-air café and beer garden, theatre, greenhouse, a "gorgeous saloon," where middle-class New Yorkers of an evening loved to resort to see the fireworks and, occasionally on holidays, the marvellous balloon ascensions.

In 1807 Art Street had been paved on the north side of the Gardens; in 1825 the city decided to open a broad street only two blocks long into them.

It was in this rural LaFayette Place, named in 1824 for the great hero on his triumphal tour, that John Jacob decided to establish his children. No through traffic would ever rumble through this quiet cul-de-sac, just one block from noisy Broadway. Lots would be sold to leading merchants and bankers, and the best ones, near Art Street, reserved for his family.

Along the west side of LaFayette arose a long series of colonnaded residences known as La Grange Terrace or LaFayette Row. Along the east side William built a red brick mansion, with stables facing the Bowery, and a bastard-Florentine house faced with granite at the corner of Art Street for his sister, Mrs. Dorothea Langdon. Between the two were the trees and gardens remaining from the old Vauxhall Gardens. It was said that a thousand lights illuminated Astor's new mansion, and all New York of a Sunday afternoon drove through widened Art Street, renamed Astor Place, to marvel at the wealth that was concentrated on aristocratic LaFayette. Antiquarians can

still see a remnant of Colonnade Row, now a restaurant, and of the Florentine palace behind huge billboards, but little is left of the quiet dignity of the terrace where Washington Irving established his town residence and in one of whose mansions Julia Gardner was married to President John Tyler.

Established in city splendour, William bethought him of a country place. Upper Manhattan was no longer the rural paradise that enticed John Jacob to build at Hellgate. Shacks and shanties were beginning to perch nonchalantly on rugged hills. So Margaret Rebecca persuaded her husband to buy La Bergerie, Father Armstrong's estate up the Hudson. Perhaps La Bergerie's upkeep had become too much for the choleric veteran of the Revolutionary and 1812 wars. The opening of the Erie Canal dumped Western farm produce into New York City, sharply reducing the value of the Hudson farm lands; many a landowner would have faced ruin had not the port's rising mercantile aristocracy begun to seek summer refuges far from the heat, dirt, noise, and fevers of the city. So in the 1830's on wide lawns with magnificent views of the Hudson and the Catskills arose stately country homes; and among them was Astor's rechristened Rokeby, General Armstrong's gloomy old mansion with octagonal tower, still a landmark for Day Line boat passengers.

With his new LaFayette Place residence for a backdrop, the younger Astor and his wife entertained. But he was too aloof and self-centred and his wife, despite her Livingston ancestry, too much the simple up-country girl for them to reign as social lights. It was unlikely that a man who focused his eyes on lots and buildings, tenants and rents, would gather around him the cosmopolitan guests that graced his father's table. Sea captains and foreign merchants, daring heroes of the plains and Cabinet secretaries, visiting diplomats and the literary lights of the day graced old Astor's table; occasionally they were to be seen at his son's in LaFayette Place. But the guest lists at William B. Astor's featured more and more the names of nascent society — already stratifying and ossifying — the Brevoorts, Crugers, Livingstons, Howlands, Jays, Schermerhorns, Duers, Stuyvesants, and Kents. Their claim to social standing

lay, like the younger Astors', not in what they had done but what their fathers and grandfathers had done.

The younger Astor was mildly Whig, but his political interests centred at City Hall in keeping taxes low and improvement assessments away from his property. Privately contemptuous of the Tammany Hall crowd, he nevertheless maintained diplomatic relations with the city's Democratic rulers, while looking hopefully on the electoral successes, nationally, of the Whigs. Still, like most Americans, he was republican. The Czar's savage repression excited him. "The Polish insurrection it appears has been put down, and what a sad affair for the poor Poles!" he wrote a friend in 1846. "The results of it must strengthen conservatism in Europe."

But it was conservatism in New York that outraged the radical press. Young Astor himself was suspect, for had he not rented his Broadway home to the young Union Club, and what was that but an effort to build in democratic America a replica of snobbish London clubocracy? James Gordon Bennett denounced the club as "raw" and sniffed suspiciously at the rule that barred women from its rooms. Such a hide-out for men only, he thundered, would degenerate into a gambling-den, a joint for wastrels and loiterers. Any organization, he concluded, that charged a hundred dollars for membership and twenty dollars a year for dues was bound to have a corrupting influence on the Republic.

And was it true that the younger Astor had a valet? The whole trend of fashionable life infuriated Bennett and fellow Democratic editors. When Gouverneur Morris returned from Paris with two queer fellows who had nothing to do but attend to their master's personal appearance, editors wrote analogies to the decline and fall of Rome; now corruption wormed into the White House, what with President Van Buren hiring Astor's former valet.

While the Astors lived in solid luxury, a reputation for parsimony clung to them and was elaborated in a hundred and one stories. Typical was the tale of Audubon trying to collect a thousand dollars that the elder Astor had pledged toward publication of *Birds of America.*

"Ah, Monsieur Audubon," Astor sighed, "you come at a bad time; money is very scarce; I have nothing in the bank; I have invested all my funds."

On Audubon's sixth visit Astor exclaimed: "Hard times, Monsieur Audubon — money scarce." And he called out to William in an adjoining room: "Have we any money at all, in the bank?"

"Yes, Father, we have $220,000 in the Bank of New York, $70,000 in the City Bank, $90,000 in the Merchants', $98,400 in the Mechanics, $83,000 —"

"That'll do, that'll do," said old Astor testily. "It seems," he added, turning rather sourly to the naturalist, "that William can give you a cheque for your money."

Antithesis of the frugal Astors was old Sam Ward, the city's leading banker, early Newportite, who boasted a private art gallery behind his home at ultra-fashionable Broadway and Bond, gave liberally to found New York University, and had a son who was the light of the *jeunesse dorée*. Sam Ward, Jr., had travelled and studied in Europe on an unlimited letter of credit, was keen on science, literature, and the arts, a connoisseur and gay young blade. But he had no taste for banking.

Sober William must have been perturbed to see young Sam paying court to Emily, his oldest girl. She herself was the gayest shoot of the Astor tree and her grandfather's favourite. She laughed her way to marriage in 1838 at the age of nineteen. After all, her guardians mused, old man Ward was the city's richest banker, and the alliance was not to be despised, even if wit and charm outbalanced sound business talent in her husband. Sam's sister Julia, later to be author of the marching song of the Civil War, described the wedding as "the most cheerful I ever saw." Old Astor presented them with a fine house on Bond Street, which still stands strong and firm after a hundred years.

Sam ingratiated himself with his new in-laws: "In the absence of Mr. Astor, his family and especially Mrs. Astor . . . need my constant attention," he wrote Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, a young college teacher whose manuscripts he was pushing. Later he had a ventriloquist out at Hellgate to make old

Astor believe he "has a cat in his belly." The true epicure and lover of man, he sent a box of grapes to his father-in-law at Rokeby. In return his father-in-law was gracious, reassuring him that "a man who has a million is as well off as if he were rich."

Light and shadow were to mark this clever young man's life. In 1841 his Emily died in childbirth, with her baby, and within a few days their oldest boy died. From death he was able to keep only little Margaret Astor Ward.

But Sam was not one to mourn forever. He married fascinating Medora Grimes. The primly respectable Astors were furious. Little Margaret was among the heathen, the littérateurs, bons vivants, the froth of the city who passed through portals sacred to the memory of the deceased Emily. Henry Brevoort, a cousin of the Astors, recorded John Jacob's wrath:

"An untoward event has just happened in his family, which has stirred his ire; a thing which always does him good. Master Sam W— has married Miss Medora Grymes and settled upon her *his* house in Bond Street, which house had been purchased, & previously given or settled upon his first wife, but by our laws, became his, after her decease. — This affair sticks deep into the old gentleman's gizzard. He views it as a sort of impeachment of his accustomed sagacity; a sort of outwitting & overreaching in the art of bargaining . . . the resentment of the A's, is, I think, carried beyond all just bounds."

Sam's sister Louisa was visiting at Rokeby when word of his engagement to bewitching Medora broke upon the Astors. William, his dour face black with rage, told the butler: "Order the carriage for Miss Ward at once!" and Louisa, all wonderment, was packed off without ceremony. Old Astor demanded that Margaret be surrendered on pain of seizure of the Bond Street house. Sam bowed.

More shadows for Sam. His second wife died, his banking house crashed, his former father-in-law brought suit to have his estate sold to satisfy taxes and to gain guardianship over Margaret. Years later Sam wrote: "I began life with prospects of a brilliant and happy career. But I was divested of my library

and my studio by the ill-advised pertinacity of Mr. Astor, who insisted on my going into business." He took a boat in 1849 to build a new life in the golden West.

William's second son-in-law was more satisfactory. He, too, was a gentleman, "one of the handsomest men of his day," but of more sober mind: Franklin Hughes Delano, son of Captain Warren Delano of Fairhaven, Massachusetts, whose fortune stemmed from whale oil. So when he gravely pressed his suit for the hand of Laura Astor, he was welcomed into the family and his bride given $200,000 in trust. After the wedding, in 1844, Delano withdrew from the shipping firm in which he was a partner and dedicated himself to a life of gentlemanly leisure. Occasionally he helped his father-in-law in the real-estate business, occasionally delved in shipping ventures.

Laura's father gave her part of the Armstrong acres at Rokeby for their estate, Stein Valetje, and her grandfather presented her with a town house in handsome Colonnade Row in La-Fayette Place.

The marriage was successful but childless. The name of Franklin Delano, it seemed, would die with its bearer. But a niece, Sarah Delano, seeking to perpetuate it, christened her child Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and he became President.

Daughters, as old Judge Mellon remarked, are luxuries; sons are a necessity. Daughters dissipate a fortune, sons concentrate it. Of William's three boys, it was on John Jacob III, the eldest, that the attention of the Astors, *père et fils*, was centred. The first of the family to be born to assured wealth and the responsibility of eventual rulership over the House of Astor, young John Jacob was sent to Columbia in preparation for his finishing in Europe. Brother-in-law Sam Ward, then in high favour, joined the family huddle over the scion's European training. It was decided that he was to spend five or six years there, one in Germany becoming a scholar, one in Italy becoming a connoisseur, a year in France to produce the finished man, two years in England, divided between Cambridge and Oxford, to polish the gentleman. But he could not be sent over alone, a mentor must be found. Sam Ward was commissioned to enlist his friend

Longfellow. The lad, then seventeen, was described as "good and industrious," the pay would be handsome, and the job ideal for one who wished to pass years abroad, living as a gentleman and working at his own dictate.

Ten days later Ward wrote his friend at Harvard again. The "patriarch," recently so enthusiastic over young John Jacob's foreign tutelage had "become seized with misgivings the other day about trusting the inheritor of his name and a large portion of his fortune abroad so long."

The lad went off finally with Cogswell, his grandfather's "prime minister and trainbearer," for two years at Göttingen. Cogswell was elated, for he had wheedled sixty thousand dollars out of the "patriarch" to buy books for the projected library.

Back in America, young John Jacob was sent to Harvard for a year in law school — a useful study for a coming real-estate magnate. He arrived in Boston low in spirits and sick. Longfellow was implored to arrange lodgings for him, to "please go and smoke a pipe with him," and later to share a gift of cigars with him.

His college training at an end, the young man worked a year in a law office and then reported for duty at the Astor office on Prince Street. Grandfather, father, and son were sitting around a table on a hot August day working hard clipping coupons.

"Great Scott, Mr. Astor," said a friend, "I should think you could get someone to do that for you on a day like this."

"Not at all," replied the old man. "If we do it ourselves, we know that it is properly done."

Rigorous training in meticulous attention to detail suited young John Jacob admirably. The glumness of the Astor distaff and Armstrong strains had settled on him; he was shy and diffident, ill at ease in company, comfortable only among those whom he knew well and with whom he agreed. And yet he was prepossessing enough, six feet tall, robust, of commanding presence — a chip off the two old blocks, and quite affable in the company of Charlotte Augusta Gibbes. She was petite, blonde, frail, possessed of charm if not beauty, and a quaintness of dic-

tion and manner that was a triumph of Mme Chegaray's exclusive finishing school. She had known John Jacob for years, for her father lived on LaFayette Place.

Julia Ward, cousin-to-be, remarked of the engagement of this daughter of the landed aristocracy to New York's richest heir: "I think they are fairly well matched. One can only say that each is good enough for the other." The aging Hone diarized the wedding festivities in 1847:

"The *better sort* have been regaled, of late, by a grand wedding. Mr. John Jacob Astor . . . has married Miss Augusta Gibbes. . . . The wedding was attended at the house of her father by all the fashionable people of the city. Last evening my daughter and son went to a grand party at Mr. Astor's, and I also was tempted to mix once more in the splendid crowd of charming women, pretty girls and well-dressed beaux. The spacious mansion in LaFayette Place was open from cellar to garret, blazing with a thousand lights. The crowd was excessive; the ladies (such part of their exquisite forms as could be distinguished in the melee) elegant and tastefully attired with a display of rich jewelry enough to pay one day's expense of the Mexican war."

By the time the third John Jacob was married, LaFayette Place had become a formidable nest of Astors. Collaterals with the names of Langdon, Bristed, Boreel, and Kane were as veritably Astors as descendants in the male line. Of all these, the Langdons, issue of John Jacob's daughter Dorothea, were the most redoubtable. That fecund lady, most unusually for her times, had reared eight children to maturity.

Despite an astounding piece of lèse-majesté in eloping with Colonel Walter Langdon during the War of 1812, Dorothea had been readmitted to the family circle after a suitable period of ostracism. Her father, a family man who could not bear malice toward his own flesh and blood for long, reinstated her in high graces and in the Florentine palazzo at LaFayette and Astor Place. Her youthful indiscretion had been committed while visiting in Washington under the too busy eye of Albert Gallatin. Colonel Langdon was "very handsome and very fascinating," she was nineteen, and Gallatin was thoroughly alarmed, for her suitor "had every recommendation except wealth, being

one of a large family." Love had its way and Astor an unchosen, unwanted son-in-law.

Once the cloud of parental disapproval had blown over, the Langdons basked in the sunshine of wealth. The Colonel, a gentleman of New Hampshire Revolutionary lineage and no particular calling, bought the estate of Hyde Park on the Hudson several miles below Rokeby and devoted himself to the life of a grand seigneur. His estate, named for Edward Hyde, Viscount Cornbury, "one of the most thorough-paced blackguards who ever wore a British coronet," had been built in the time of George III. Old Astor never really forgave Langdon and hedged in his daughter's heritage with legal provisions lest "her husband, present or future, or any one claiming under his act or default, shall attempt to interfere with, dispose of or incumber the said legacy." In event of his wife's death, the suspect son-in-law was to be dismissed with a mere five-thousand-dollar annuity, a pitiful sum for the master of Hyde Park.

Dorothea's oldest daughter, Sarah, was the second to bring a real title into the family by marrying, in Paris, Baron François Robert Boreel, chamberlain to the King of the Netherlands and first secretary to the Dutch legation in Paris. The Boreels, reinforced by old Astor's generosity, set themselves up in The Hague and her father built a house for her on Broadway.

Pretty, dark-haired Eliza, Dorothea's second daughter, married an English gentleman, Matthew Wilks, in 1842, and retired, English-wise, to Ontario, where Wilks became a country gentleman at Cruikston Park near Galt. Their son, Matthew Astor Wilks, was to marry the richest woman in America, poor Sylvia Green.

Louisa, another of Dorothea's daughters, imitated her by eloping with dashing Oliver De Lancey Kane, in whose veins flowed the most distinguished of attainted Tory blood. All unmindful of his own youthful escapade, Colonel Langdon read Louisa out of the family, and her grandfather revoked most of his bequests. But after a few years the old fellow relented, and the death of her father in 1847 brushed away the last obstacle to her re-entry into family circles.

Walter, oldest of the Colonel's sons, inherited Hyde Park and

marked the event by marrying a Livingston. Woodbury, an artist of sorts, married Helen Colford Jones of a respectable family. Helen earned old Astor's rebuke for sitting " near the open fire when wearing her valuable furs " — a mortal sin to the old fur-trader.

What a man old Astor's second daughter Magdalen would have made! In her was all the assurance and self-centred will that raised her father from the ruck. He delighted to take her to Montreal for the dash of the winter season in the fur capital, and was elated when he married her to Adrian Bentzon, the luckless Governor of the Virgin Islands. Bentzon was the ideal son-in-law, the kind Astor wanted to duplicate for Dorothea. The couple had two children, John Jacob Astor, drowned while with his anguished grandfather in Washington, and Sarah, who died in infancy.

When the Virgin Islands were handed back to Denmark in 1815, Bentzon had no ties except marital to bind him to Magdalen, and he rushed off to resume his governorship. Cheerfully he admitted adultery to an Astor agent and happily he settled down on Santa Cruz, far, far away from the redoubtable Magdalen.

Her second husband was an inoffensive fellow — the Reverend John Bristed, an Englishman who made a living of a sort from law, lectures, and letters. He fled back to England, finding it impossible, according to Henry Brevoort, " to bear the matrimonial yoke any longer with the Lamb of Bellzebub, my well beloved Couzen, the late Mrs. Bentzon. . . . She is certainly a maniac."

Her son Charles, who added the second name " Astor," was welcomed under his grandfather's special care, reproved for " taking butter that he did not eat," sent to Harvard and then to Cambridge. He emerged with a taste for belles-lettres, married a Brevoort and remained a favourite of old Astor.

Youngest of John Jacob's daughters was frail Eliza, a clever agreeable girl, according to Irving. Her father was suspected of wanting to marry her to James Gallatin, son of the financier and diplomat. " It has been proposed to leave the son here in a counting house," related an observer. " I perceive that he does

not like this; — & I doubt whether he will easily be brought into the plan of marriage." Young Gallatin, who disliked Astor's table manners, escaped.

Eliza accompanied her father on his European jaunts, became hostess of his Geneva estate, Genthod, and eventually married Count Vincent Rumpff, the minister of the Hanse cities in Paris. Son-in-law Vincent was distinctly useful as adviser and informant on the course of European commerce and politics. Eliza died in 1838 and the Count got much of her estate.

It was to this family, consisting not only of Astors, but of Bristeds, Kanes, Langdons, Boreels, Wilks, Wards, and Delanos, that the news of the Founder's death, that bright morning of March 29, 1848, brought sorrow and anticipation: sorrow for one who had so genuinely loved his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren — the main expression of love that Astor had permitted himself — anticipation as to how his vast accumulation of lots and acres, stocks and bonds, were to be distributed. Fifteen grandchildren mourned at the patriarch's funeral on April 1, and gathered a few days later to hear William Backhouse, new head of the House of Astor, read that involved document with eight codicils: the Founder's will.

CHAPTER *ii*

Astor's Iron Will

In the name of God, Amen," began the will, "I, John Jacob Astor, of the City of New-York, desiring to dispose of all the real and personal Estate to which I may be entitled at the time of my decease, in the manner hereinafter expressed do make this my last Will and Testament.

"First, to my daughter Dorothea . . ."

Red-eyed with weeping, eager with anticipation, the Astor clan standing on the edge of millionairedom hung breathless on each word. New York waited a-tiptoe to hear how the greatest hoard ever accumulated in the New World was to be apportioned. Enterprising James Gordon Bennett splashed his front page with six columns of the document in fine brevier type.

To Dorothea, a massive woman what with her Astorian frame, much rich living, and childbearing, all the furniture in Astor's house at 485 Broadway, "also the use, during her life, of all *my silver plate,* my new service of plate excepted." (On what an incidental note to begin the disposal of twenty million dollars!) "Also, I give and bequeath to her for her life, the income of the following stocks, debt and money . . ."

$100,000 in five-per-cent New York City debt.

500 shares, Bank of America.

1,000 shares, The Manhattan Company.

$25,000, New York Life Insurance and Trust Company.

Also her house and lot on LaFayette Place.

Thus ended the will for Dorothea. But was that all? No, thank Heaven, there were eight codicils.

The first stated that if the income from stocks and bonds did not equal $15,000, the deficit was to be made up from the residuary estate. The second codicil gave Dorothea the income of another $100,000 for life; the fifth, two more lots on LaFayette Place. But it was all in trust, for old John Jacob thought little of women's rights, their ability in business affairs, or their prerogative to select their heirs, and he was gnawed by fear of grasping husbands.

To Dorothea's seven children went a big slice in the Astor acres; equal shares in lots on the east side of LaFayette Place to the Bowery; more than 100 lots in former Vice President Clinton's west-side property. The first codicil gave them more of LaFayette Place and $50,000; the second, $100,000 and five lots on the south side of Grand Street between Orchard and Norfolk (these children were to live to see their property take first rank among the city's noisome slums); one half of their dead Aunt Eliza's estate: $75,000 in securities, 500 shares in the Merchants Bank, 802 shares in the Mechanics Bank.

Special favours for Dorothea's three sons, Walter, Woodbury, and Eugene Langdon: eight lots on Broadway between Broome and Spring Streets, $25,000 each on coming of age, and $25,000 more on reaching thirty. Her four daughters shared in lots and houses on Broadway between Prince and Houston and they, too, each received $25,000. One of her daughters, Baroness Boreel, a Dutchwoman, got the City Hotel, the five-story brownstone structure at Broadway and Thames; or if her alien nationality prevented her from holding New York realty, $10,000 a year for life — happy news for My Lord Boreel. To Cecilia Langdon, youngest of Dorothea's daughters, was willed Genthod, Astor's villa on the shores of Lake Geneva.

Next in line stood Charles Astor Bristed, whom old Astor especially loved, for he was the only descendant of his daughter Magdalen. To him, littérateur and man of the world at twenty-six, went his grandfather's mansion on Broadway, a proper background for entertaining. (Fortunately Aunt Dorothea got that mess of oddly assorted furniture gathered from the earth's four corners.) To him, too, old Astor's domain at Hellgate — mansion, outbuildings, and thirteen acres. To maintain the

Broadway mansion and Hellgate, the income on $115,000, and a quarter share in dead Aunt Eliza's estate — $37,500 in securities, 250 shares in the Merchant's Bank, 401 in the Mechanics. Also, a lot on LaFayette, a lot on Broadway, nine lots at Eighth Avenue and Twenty-sixth Street; 43 lots between Seventh Avenue and Broadway from Thirty-seventh to Fortieth; eight lots on Avenue A between Sixth and Seventh Streets; 22 lots on Houston. Charles Astor Bristed was made a millionaire.

That disposed of all of Astor's living children and grandchildren except his main heir, William Backhouse, and his progeny. But the old man had brothers and sisters, and many of them proliferated. How did they share in the horn of plenty?

A life annuity of £200 to the widow of George Astor in London, and $20,000 each to his four daughters. A promising start. But with George's sons Uncle John Jacob was much more discriminating. Joseph, who never came to America, got $25,000. William Henry, who came to New York and turned into a musician, $10,000. To George, Jr., who came and proved a most indifferent assistant to his uncle, $3,000. Apparently Astor valued them in direct proportion to their distance.

Before reaching this final score, George's children fluctuated like a fever thermometer from codicil to codicil. One daughter was elevated to $30,000 in the first and cut back to $20,000 in the fifth. Joseph was raised to $50,000, William Henry's $10,000 was replaced by a $500 annuity, then Joseph got a £300 annuity in lieu of his $50,000; one niece was cut to $15,000, perhaps for complaining about interest being charged on the pittance she received from Uncle Henry, the butcher drover.

To a niece in Germany, $10,000 and a $300 annuity; to his sister Catherine, the distilleress, $1,000; to the children of her daughter, $5,000; to the children of her son, $1,000 each. Catherine and her progeny were paying for her scorn of John Jacob's high position in the world.

So far the will had given away the merest fraction of Astor's fortune. What was provided in the way of a generous philanthropy to disarm scoffing Democratic editors and to give judicious Whigs food for editorial approval? Would he found a

home in Detroit or St. Louis for his old voyageurs, engagés, and traders, broken by hard life in his service, or for the sailors who manned his fleet? How fared that library, the dream of Cogswell's life? The Astor clan, gathered in the modest two-story brick building on Prince Street, headquarters for this $20,000,000 estate, listened eagerly to hear how much of the fortune was placed beyond their grasp.

First, $400,000 was set apart for the Astor Library.

To the German Society, $25,000 to advise immigrants and protect them "against imposition to which strangers without knowledge of the country or its language, may be exposed."

To Columbia College, alma mater of his grandson and namesake, $25,000 by his will for a chair in German language and literature. Revoked in his fourth codicil. The German Reformed Congregation, $2,000, later revoked.

To the Association for the Relief of Respectable Aged Indigent Females, $25,000; the Institute for the Blind, $5,000; the Society for the Relief of Half Orphans and Destitute Children, $5,000; the Lying-in Asylum, $2,000.

For a home for "the use of the *poor of Waldorf,*" $50,000.

To his secretary, Fitz-Greene Halleck, a $200 annuity.

In all, some $500,000 had been set apart for philanthropy — one fortieth of the Astor fortune.

And that practically ended the last will and testament of John Jacob Astor — save that he bundled up the remainder of his estate and handed it over to his son and heir, William Backhouse, under provisions which skirted the letter and evaded the spirit of New York's laws against entail and primogeniture.

By his will of July 4, 1836 Astor laid down the principle which was to govern his heirs for generations and thereby assure the continuance of a monolithic fortune. It was simplicity itself: William B. Astor was not to inherit his father's property outright, but as a life trust, which he could not give away or dissipate. At his side, with full power, was a board of trustees sitting in high judgment over the Astor Estate. On that board William B.'s voice counted for but one vote; the others were James B. King, Washington Irving, James Gallatin, Daniel Lord, Jr. (Astor's confidential lawyer), and John Jacob III. In

effect the heir was to serve as manager of his father's domain with the advice and consent of five others and the supervision of the New York State Supreme Court.

It was the outstanding example, in republican America, of Plutus binding his realm in practical entail against the folly or lack of hard-headed ability of his heir — a transplanting of the British system which entrenched a landowning class against the land-users.

Two years after signing his will, old Astor began to fear that his determination to entail his estate might run smack into laws recently passed that were especially hostile to trusts and other devices suspending the power to dispose of property. Democratic legislators looked at England's landed estates and decided that vast accumulations of wealth must not be allowed in America to snowball into eternity. Entails and primogeniture had been forbidden years before; the Legislature now put bounds on the kind of trust Astor had set up by limiting it to two generations and limiting trusts for the accumulation of rents and profits.

Of all things, the Founder feared suits challenging his will. Well might his Langdon grandchildren have complained of being fobbed off with mere quarter-million portions of his holdings while their cousins, children of Uncle William, were assured the inheritance of more than $15,000,000. In 1838 Astor modified the trust set up over his residual estate. One half of his fortune was to go to William absolutely, to be treated as his own property; of the other half he was to enjoy only the income, and even that, old Astor directed, should be used to enhance the value of the first half. Further, he was forbidden to give away the second half of his father's residuary estate. It must go to his children, in whatever manner he thought fit, but to no one or nothing else.

Old Astor's dead hand thus stretched out over the living: under no circumstances were they to give their property away; it must go to their heirs. Failing heirs, the property must go to other branches of the family. While the old man could not bind his grandsons, John Jacob III, William, or Henry, to continue the trust device to create a kind of self-perpetuating entail,

there was no question that he intended that they do so.

The death of two of his sons and the insanity of the third made it easy for Astor to follow the principle of primogeniture. That he wished it continued he indicated rather plainly in his will when he gave what was to be the gem of the Astor Estate to William B.'s three sons: one half to the oldest, John Jacob III, the remaining quarters to William and Henry. Nevertheless he thrust into their father's hands the right to tighten the rein by transferring property from wilful to dutiful sons. As with other bequests, they had no power to give away their birthright: it must be handed down to their children; failing children, divided among other members of the family.

Equally they were forbidden to sell merely to squander. They might sell up to half their patrimony, but for the sole purpose of improving the other half.

Because they would inherit their father's estate, John Jacob III, William, and Henry did not receive much outright in their grandfather's will aside from the immensely valuable tract of land lying between Forty-second and Fifty-first Streets from Broadway to the Hudson River. To the three boys and their two sisters went a quarter interest in Aunt Eliza's property — a substantial fortune in itself. The two older boys got the inevitable LaFayette Place lots, and John Jacob III, the scion, Astor's French plate.

The Founder changed his mind twice about William's daughters. At first William was charged to set aside $200,000 portions for them when they married with his consent. Later remembering the hazards of elopement and non-marriage, old Astor directed that the $200,000 be given them on marriage or upon reaching twenty-one. In the final codicil of 1843 he abandoned all efforts to interfere by leaving William to care for his daughters as he pleased.

In his will Astor directed his executors "to provide for my unfortunate son John Jacob Astor, and to procure for him all the comforts which his condition doth or may admit," to the extent of $5,000 a year. If restored to sanity, he was to get $10,000 a year. His father even provided against the unlikely chance that John Jacob II might marry by stipulating that each

child was to have $5,000 a year — a meagre sum intended to discourage such an unhappy eventuality.

In 1838 Astor made more generous provision for his son by erecting a house for him at Ninth Avenue and Fourteenth Street, covering several lots. The property, bounded by a high fence, containing a large garden in which the imbecile could exercise without public scrutiny, was to go on his death to the children of William B. and Dorothea.

Whatever joy Dorothea and her children may have felt as they received their $2,000,000 worth was soured when they realized that $15,000,000 or more was given to William B. and his family. And William already had an independent fortune worth $5,000,000! Poor relations, the Langdons — although each within a few years would be a millionaire, thanks to the soaring values of the realty they had inherited. Indisputably of the House of Astor, they were destined to live in the back yard.

Society gossiped over reports emanating from fat Dolly's Florentine palazzo at LaFayette and Astor Place. Dolly was in a rage — a truly Astorian rage — and called in her lawyer. She made demand upon her brother for the income of the two $100,000 life trusts, and that quiet, somewhat dour gentleman — shocked no doubt by Dolly's greed — refused to hand over the $10,000 which was hers. And so the long and wordy case of Langdon vs. Astor's Executors was on, to the delight of the legal fraternity and the malicious enjoyment of anti-Astorites. Nine years after his death, the case reached the final Court of Appeals, which decided that Astor, despite all his legal advice, had erred. The Estate was ordered to make up the deficit in the $15,000 yearly income assured Dorothea.

But the Dolly Langdon legal mess was as nothing compared to that kicked up by her daughter Louisa. She had done what her parents did, rather than what they preached, when she eloped with De Lancey Kane. A family tied together by real estate could not tolerate daughters bringing in undesirable strangers to share in the spoils. Louisa's inheritance was cut by two thirds. She lost one half of all the real estate that had been allotted her. Rights of inheritance from the estates of her

mother and her brothers and sisters were revoked. Cash legacies were transferred to others. The Founder later relented and gave her a house on Broadway to make up for the one she had lost on LaFayette Place and another lot. After his death Dorothea gave Louisa back half of what she had lost, in accordance with a provision in the will.

Louisa, a spirited woman of twenty-eight, and her proud husband, De Lancey Kane, were not so easily satisfied. Uncle William was asked to reinstate her in her full inheritance on the ground that the sixth codicil, which punished her, was imperfect. Uncle William stood by the will. Louisa went to court, but the judge threw her case out. She appealed and won sympathy. The Astor Estate then appealed. A sister added to the confusion by a counter-appeal. A horde of attorneys hovered over the final conflict. The Court of Appeals upheld the estate here, Louisa there, in an intricate decision that still left Louisa the loser by $50,000 for her elopement. Nevertheless the $200,000 in securities and real estate were to keep doubling in decades to follow so that children of the De Lancey Kanes — poor relations to the Astors and even to the other Langdons — were nevertheless to be known as millionaires.

Lawsuits might nibble at the edges of John Jacob Astor's iron will, but they could not alter its central theme, the transmission of the main monolithic hoard to sons in the male line, and chiefly to the oldest son. Astor had succeeded in founding a House, rooted in Manhattan's rock, that could stand as long as sons were obedient. Fortunes built on stocks and bonds and merchants' inventories might wash away, but the House of Astor would remain.

That obvious fact eluded *Harper's Magazine,* which pronounced: " If this colossal fortune had been gained in Europe, it would probably have been consumed in what is called ' founding ' a family. Mansions would have been built with it, parks laid out, a title of nobility purchased; and the income wasted in barren and stupid magnificence would have maintained a host of idle, worthless and pampered menials." Fortunately *Harper's,* which could overlook Rokeby, Hellgate, Hyde Park, and Stein Valetje, could not then see England's greatest man-

sion, Cliveden, maintained in magnificence for William Waldorf, Viscount Astor.

Democratic America, having shattered the feudal manorial system along the Hudson, was being confronted with its first modern House. James Gordon Bennett, editor of the *Herald,* was troubled. Yet he blamed, not Astor, but Washington Irving, Cogswell, and Halleck. "The results of their doctrines, their views, their ideas, their talk, appear in the will," wrote Bennett, "and to judge from the document, we must say that we don't think much of their teachings. If we had been an associate of John Jacob Astor — we should have given him some instruction in political economy, at least, of a very different character from which it appears he has imbibed from those he lived among. The first idea we should have put in his head, would have been that *one half of his immense property — ten millions at least — belonged to the people of the City of New York.* During the last 50 years of the life of John Jacob Astor, his property has been augmented and increased in value by the aggregate intelligence, industry, enterprise and commerce of New York, fully to the amount of half its value." The other half, for his family, would have been "a sum quite enough for any reasonable person, of any rank in this country."

Instead, remarked Bennett, he had given $400,000 to a library. "What a poor, mean and beggarly result from association with such distinguished literary men, philosophers, and poets!"

Radicals might rage that he should have given away half his hoard, but Emerson praised the gift of $400,000 for a library as comparable with the Lawrence School at Cambridge and George Peabody's great-hearted gifts in Baltimore and the South. Indeed, many Democrats were more fearful of what Dives might dispense than what he kept. New York State was soon to forbid the giving away of more than half the estate, if there were heirs. Ever as an example stood too richly endowed Trinity Church, the city's biggest landlord, "blighting our city with its interminable leases," as the conservative *Morning Express* put it. Education and culture, it was feared, might sell their souls to the Astors in return for riches.

His son and heir turned to those clauses in the will establishing the Astor Library. Three times the Founder had changed his mind about a site, finally assigning less valuable lots in LaFayette Place; he had directed the expenditure of money: $35,000 was for the two lots, the building must not cost more than $75,000, not more than $120,000 was to be spent on books, the remainder to be the endowment. But the $75,000 would build only a cramped structure, and the endowment, producing less than $10,000 a year, was clearly inadequate.

Nevertheless old Cogswell, who had been busy for years buying books and preparing a catalogue, was happy. This new library was his own monument. "Had I not foreseen," he wrote, "that this object would never have been effected unless someone had been at the old gentleman's elbow to push him on, I should have left New York long since."

Even so, he could never persuade "the old gentleman" actually to proceed with the building. This project, which might well have been the hobby of a retired man of wealth, interested him not at all. Money, and a set of Audubon's *Birds of America,* were his contribution. Nephew Henry Brevoort shed some light on his reason for dallying with the library idea and continuing to enjoy the income of the property destined for it:

"Dr. Williams . . . told me a good story about the old boy. . . . He consulted the Dr. as to what items of property he might conscientiously conceal from assessment. The Dr. thought the Library legacy was a fair one for exemption — Oh! said Money-bags, I had tought of dat & so he continued to every proposition of the Doctor's. At this rate the Legacy, if the old man holds out long enough will turn out a profitable speculation!"

The institution on LaFayette Place was Cogswell's triumph. In it he stocked 100,000 books — strong in history, mathematics, language, and bibliography — the biggest collection in the country. Harvard claimed only 72,000, Philadelphia 60,000, the Boston Athenæum 50,000, the Library of Congress 50,000. In New York the Mercantile, for the improvement of clerks and apprentices, and the Society, which catered to the aristocrats, each numbered 32,000 volumes.

The Astor was New York's only reference library. Even so it was pretty much of a mystery to everyone save Cogswell, for library science was yet to be devised. Cogswell was a gentleman and scholar, not a librarian. There was no card index, and the expensive catalogue was not published until 1864.

The building was opened with great éclat in 1854 in the presence of Mayor Westervelt and most of the trustees — Washington Irving, William B. Astor, Daniel Lord, Jr., the estate's lawyer; James G. King, old Astor's banker friend and trustee; Cogswell, Halleck, Henry Brevoort, Jr., Samuel B. Ruggles, and Charles Bristed. It became a sight of the town: the bored Prince of Wales had to inspect it, and Prince Napoleon, Dom Pedro, and those strange emissaries the commissioners of Japan. Among the savants who used its alcoves were Irving, who wrote his *Life of George Washington* there, Edward Everett, Halleck, S. F. B. Morse, Thackeray, Dickens, Longfellow, Emerson, Holmes, and near-sighted Greeley, who had a special table raised to his eye-level. Charles Sumner wrote of the library: "I range daily in the alcoves of the Astor: more charming than the gardens of Boccaccio and each hour a Decameron." But let no one misconstrue Sumner's tribute. A literary gentleman penned this praise: "I do not believe there is so *pure* a collection of books of the same size in the world. . . . There are not a half a dozen . . . that could bring a blush to the most innocent cheek; and as for that abominable class of works facetiously known as Facetiæ, the Astor Library has none of it."

No sooner were the 100,000 books installed than the building bulged. William B. provided another lot and a wing, opened in 1859.

Astor's other beneficence, the Astor Haus in Waldorf, owed its origin perhaps to a situation described in a descendant's anecdote. The old man was being plagued with begging letters from Waldorf, of which he was the most illustrious product. For such he had a form letter:

"My Dear Sir: You ask me to support you on the ground that your father was my cousin and playmate. I remember my cousins and playmates very distinctly. I do not find your father among them; but if he was I refer you to the Home for the

Destitute Old which I have built and endowed at Waldorf. I know of no reason why it should not be occupied by my own relations."

Alas for anecdotes, the Astor Haus was not built until six years after his death. The $50,000 he set aside for Waldorf was to make "some provision for the sick or disabled, or the education and improvement of the young, who may be in a condition to need the aid of such fund." He suggested that Son-in-law Count Vincent Rumpff should be consulted. John Jacob III was said to have supervised the building of the $7,000 home and the setting up of the endowment.

"I take great pride in the Astor House of New York," William B. was quoted, "but a greater pride in the Astor Haus at Waldorf. The massive granite blocks and pillars of the former may crumble and fall to the ground or its columns and corridors become choked with weeds, but the latter will continue in existence while the town of Waldorf exists and there are any poor people in it."

Such a peroration seemed quite unlike William B., who never made a speech in his life, but perhaps his sentiments if not his words were faithfully reported.

CHAPTER *iii*

Improvement of the Poor

"THE YANKEES," boasted Philip Hone during the gold rush days following old Astor's death, "run faster, fly higher and dig deeper than any other people under the sun." And their capital, Manhattan, he might have added, will grow faster, higher, and denser per acre than any other spot in Yankeeland. With it, the Astor fortune will double in the short twenty-seven years that are to mark the reign of William B. He was born in a town of 35,000, he came into his fortune in a city of 500,000, he died in a metropolis of 1,500,000. And for that reason men came begging to his plain little office in Prince Street for the privilege of building homes, tenements, factories on the land that his father had bought as farms in the 1810's and 1820's. He need do nothing but sign leases, train an heir, and die, like his father, the richest man in America.

The New York of which this tall, heavy-set, stooped, greying man of fifty-six was the leading individual landlord sprawled over half of Manhattan Island. Already the Harlem steam trains from City Hall provided rapid service up to Fortieth Street, the very edge of town, where fashionables promenaded in the evening along the rim of the marvellous Croton Reservoir or sauntered over to examine the Crystal Palace, with its acres of glass and tons of spider-like iron ribbing. Gramercy Park had just been enclosed by the Ruggleses who sat on the Astor Library board, and around that as well as Union Place, Washington Square, Tompkins Square, and St. John's Park on the west side

the newly rich were building their homes, revelling in gas illumination and toilets flushed with Croton water.

For a dollar you could get a box at Astor's Park Theatre on Park Row, or spend an afternoon in that marbled building opposite the Astor House known as the P. T. Barnum's American Museum, with its "500,000 curiosities" — a combined Coney Island, zoo, Museum of Natural History, Art Institute, and Tussaud waxworks. Broadway and Fulton were the crossroads of business; over Fulton was flaunted a huge American flag bearing the words: "Dr. Townsend's Sarsaparilla Depot," and in his depot could be bought his incomparable concoction, "a sovereign and speedy cure for incipient consumption, barrenness, prolapsus uteri, costiveness, piles . . . and all general prostration of the system." All up and down Broadway throve "Daguerrian galleries." A marvellous model of the city boasting 2,500,000 glazed paper windows, 35,000 fences and walls, 150,000 chimneys, 30,000 trees, 5,000 pieces of shipping, faithfully reproduced the spires of Trinity, St. Thomas's and St. Paul's, the Astor House, the Merchants Exchange on Wall Street, and the Egyptian Hall of Justice, known popularly as the Tombs.

Well-to-do New York lived "above Bond Street," worked in Wall Street or in the shops and offices along Broadway, or directed shipping along South Street. It was Episcopalian and Whig. The other New York was Catholic and Democratic, fiercely interested in Europe, and lived in the poverty and disease of the squalid tenement houses. In-between New York kept to the Bowery, the great middle-class artery, was Evangelical, distrusted radical Democratic editors and High Tory Whigs alike.

Hardly was William B. Astor installed as head of his family than the radicals met in a frenzy of enthusiasm on April 3, 1848 in City Hall Park to celebrate the new French Revolution. They resolved, amid cheers and torchlights watched by aristocrats from the Astor House and the newspaper offices fronting the Park:

"That the name alone of a Republic will not give to all their rights. That while the right of monopolized property in land is

allowed to exist, the many will be at the mercy of the few. That the landed aristocracy are the cause of most of the evils that oppress the human race. That under the plea of property the masses have been robbed of their labor while the few have revelled in luxury rendered more piquant by the misery of their fellow creatures." An orator saluted "France as the social Savior of mankind." The *Tribune* commented on the "unusual sublimity" of the scene, but to Astor, a silent, ponderous man, the thought must have come that the New York mob, sooner or later, would have to be taught a lesson.

The first instalment of that lesson was administered the very next year, and almost under Astor's window. Twenty-two persons were shot and killed in the Astor Place Opera House riot, presumably in a dispute over an English actor. But people do not face militia musketry for the scorn of an actor; deep down was the hatred of the anti-British, anti-aristocratic, hotly democratic masses of turbulent New York for everything represented by Actor Macready — and that included Trinity Church, the wealthy, the Astors. Astor Place was popularly renamed Massacre Place.

The passions of the populace could have been inflamed by the Mortier lease which John Jacob Astor had wrung from Aaron Burr's necessities in the 1800's. William B. Astor continued to pay Trinity Church the lease rental of $269, but reaped up to $250,000 a year. Based on Trinity's rental, the return was 100,000 per cent; if the price paid Burr were included, then 3,000 per cent; adding other costs, between 1,000 and 2,000 per cent per annum — the finest single investment in all Christendom.

Astor's ground rent on any one of the hundreds of lots in the Mortier lease would have paid his annual fee to Trinity; indeed, he ejected George B. Lent for falling behind in his $1,000-a-quarter rent for premises at 163 Greenwich Street. Into the tenant houses on Astor's Mortier lease he was stuffing the Irish who demonstrated at City Hall Park for the French Revolution and who were shot down in Astor Place. The proud houses of merchants and bankers were now rented out, a family to a room, and if the rooms were big, sub-landlords par-

titioned them into quarters more suitable to the immigrants fresh from plague-ridden Irish shanties.

Other landlords opened Gramercy and St. John's as private parks to encourage middle-class realty developments; Astor would have nothing to do with such schemes so long as he could demonstrate that a thousand families housed in one block at $10 a family added up to $10,000 and that a hundred families at $50 a family brought in only $5,000. If John Jacob anticipated John D. Rockefeller in the uses of monopoly, William B. was to anticipate Henry Ford in the uses of mass production of low-price utilities for the multitude. The ship-owner knew that the steerage was the most profitable part of his ship; the railroad-owner knew that the day coach gave the highest return of any of his cars; Astor knew that slums were the real profit-makers. Let there be slums!

The man who was known as "the Landlord of New York" walked every morning from his home on LaFayette Place to the office of the Astor Estate on Prince off Broadway, arriving between nine and ten o'clock and leaving at three. It was a routine he followed faithfully for fifty years.

Seen on Broadway, he was indistinguishable from the run of merchants and clerks. Matthew Hale Smith described him as a "tall, heavy-built man with a decided German look, a countenance blank, eyes small and contracted, a look sluggish and unimpassioned, unimpressive in his feelings, taciturn and unsocial." His expression seemed careworn although he had no visible worries, about either property or family. His shoulders stooped under an invisible burden, his clothes dangled from a large frame, his spirits seemed constantly damped. Perhaps he had paid a price, one far too high, for the rank of wealthiest American.

The story is told that soon after his father's death William met John Aspinwall, the aggressive young engineer who was to build the Panama Railroad. The millionaire, out at last at the age of fifty-six from under his father's discipline, offered Aspinwall the job of manager of the Astor Estate at $100,000 a year, on one condition — that he keep the job for life. After a day's thought Aspinwall turned down the offer. Years later, a mil-

lionaire himself, he met Astor and told him why $100,000 a year was not tempting. "I would have been a slave for life," he said. "I preferred to be a free man."

Perhaps Astor winced. The days of his youth, when he too had been a free man roaming the Continent and planning incursions into Asia, were gone and he could not resurrect them now.

The routine of his later years was spent with his oldest son, John Jacob III, training him into the same sombre business of landlording, conferring with his son-in-law, Franklin H. Delano, and his lawyer, Dan Lord, on leases, lawsuits, rentals, sales, and purchases. Together they could be seen poring over huge plat books on which Manhattan lay piecemeal in tens of thousands of narrow strips — the typical twenty-five- by hundred-foot lots. Agents made their reports on delinquent tenants, dumped their money-bags on the table, itemized repairs. A couple of aging clerks on high-legged stools toiled over accounts.

It was said that Astor knew every window sash in every building he owned, knew exactly when each house had been repaired or painted, could recite his rent-roll by heart. Those were interesting facts, but not important. His chief agent knew as much; as for Astor, he could have stayed at Rokeby — or Timbuctoo — for all it mattered. The city grew and grew, the value of his realty grew and grew, and so long as he literally did nothing about it, he became wealthier and wealthier.

For a man with thousands of lots, houses, and buildings scattered over the island giving him an income mounting toward a million a year, it seemed astonishing that he needed so small an office force. The secret lay in a doubly advantageous system of landlording which at once relieved him of most of a landlord's troubles and of the moral responsibility for what went on in his properties. On hundreds of lots he collected only the ground rent and permitted his tenants to build their own buildings on leases which generally ran for twenty-one years. The lessee rented the building, paid the taxes and assessments, and assumed all the burden of upkeep. And most of the houses which Astor himself owned he also leased. The lessee became, in effect, a sub-landlord, caring for the property and collecting the rents. The system was convenient in cutting down Astor's re-

sponsibility for routine management and in relieving him of the moral stigma which was being attached to slum-ownership.

That problem received first official recognition in 1835 when the city health inspector was obliged to account for the enormous death-roll. "We have serious cause to regret," that official reported, "that there is in our city so many mercenary landlords who only contrive in whatever manner they can to stow the greatest number of human beings in the smallest space."

The continuing epidemics and plagues caused Dr. John H. Griscom, as health inspector, to make his famous report in 1845 on the *Sanitary Condition of the Laboring People of New York.*"

"*The system of tenantry,*" he reported, "to which large numbers of the poor are subjected, I think, must be regarded as one of the principal causes of the helpless and noisome manner in which they live. The basis of these evils is the subjection of the tenantry to the merciless inflictions and extortions of the *sub-landlord.* A house or a row or court of houses is hired by some person of the owner on a lease of several years for a sum which will yield a fair interest on the cost. The *owner* is thus relieved of the great trouble incidental to the changing of tenants and the collection of rents. His income is sure from one individual and obtained without annoyance or oppression on his part. It thus becomes the object of the lessee to make and save as much as possible with his adventure, sufficient sometimes to enable him to purchase the property in a short time."

The devil in the slum picture, then, was the sub-landlord, not the landlord. That eased Trinity and Astor, the Goelets, Roosevelts, Stuyvesants, Rhinelanders, and Kips out of moral responsibility.

Griscom's figures showed that a fourth of the babies of New York died before their first year; one third before they reached five; half the surviving children before they reached twenty. "We who claim to be intelligent and civilized," he cried, "suffer our numbers and strength, the bones and sinews and hearts of our people to waste and die away in narrow and gloomy caverns of our own construction, with a rapidity surpassing the

combined torrents of pestilence and war. Our sin is that we permit these things in the midst of the light of science and under the inspired dictates of a religion whose most prominent features are charity and love."

In 1847 the Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor warned that " the tenements of the poor " were the warrens of disease, the breeders of debased social habits and morals, of wretchedness, pauperism, and crime. " Defective as are these tenements, they frequently pay rents which, increased by a system of sub-tenantry, become very oppressive."

In 1853 the A.I.C.P. was complaining again of tenements. " Capitalists . . . appear not to have known until recently how much the laboring classes suffer from this cause." The economics of the slum was underlined: Tenements yield fifteen to twenty per cent clear profit while houses for the wealthy and the middle class earn only six to seven per cent. The typical tenement comprised a room ten by twelve feet with an unventilated bedroom even smaller, and sometimes it contained two to four families.

By 1856 the stench of the slums assailed the nostrils of the editor of the *Times*. " There are tenant houses for Germans in Second and Third Streets [Astor domain] which are estimated to pay a full 50 per cent. . . . For our part we cannot envy the feelings of the man of wealth surrounded though he be with luxuries and comforts whose incomes are reaped from the rents of such houses. To know that I am living in splendid saloons while he who feeds my wealth rots in a pestiferous cellar! To live on the *poison of the poor!* Of course many — perhaps the majority of those who own these houses, know nothing of how they are used. Their agents let and underlet and hand the proceeds to the landlords. Still with a humane man even ignorance is no excuse. He *should* know."

The years before the Civil War saw the tenements spreading up and down the lower stretches of the city below Fourteenth Street. No law regulated their height or depth or darkness. Fires ravaged them; the city hospitals were filled with the sick from their ever darkened rooms; the jails burst with the prod-

ucts of the stinking slums. The State Legislature set up a committee which reported:

"Our committee could not, in their principal labors, contemplate the magnitude nor realize the description of social disorder which their investigation was destined to develop too plainly. . . . Our experience, like that of the cities of the Old World, is that the avarice of capitalists *renders governmental interference for the protection of the poor and unfortunate* AN ABSOLUTE NECESSITY! . . . Of all the avenues through which avaricious selfishness reaches and takes from the poor, there is not one in which its operations are so profoundly manifested in populous cities, as landlordism. The landlord digs deep and from damp foundations, rears his feeble walls far up until they tremble. He measures the height of his ceilings by the shortest of the people, and by thin partitions divides the interior into as narrow spaces as the leanest carpenter can work in."

The immigrant ships were unloading a thousand people a day, many of them without the means of leaving New York. Famine in Ireland, poverty in Germany, filled Astor's tenant houses to bursting. In 1847–8, half-starved, typhus-ridden Irish families walked the roads toward the poorhouses of Galway, the fever sheds of Skibbereen, to board emigrant ships which rivalled, below decks, the Black Hole of Calcutta. Lord Lansdowne cheerfully emptied his own poorhouses and dumped their wretched inmates into the ships.

Some 52,000 Irish and 53,000 Germans were landed in 1847 on the docks of New York. About 10,000 went immediately on public relief; perhaps half the remainder, stranded, crawled into the slums to live. The next year 300,000 immigrants were landed in a city of 500,000. A wicked industry grew up to prey upon the hapless foreigners. Fake railroad tickets were sold by boarding-house runners; the newcomers were crowded into the "vilest and most abominable sites ever inhabited by swine." In their misery many turned to the grog shop installed in every boarding house, where whisky colored with oak juice and labelled "first-class cognac," and gin described as Monongahela schnapps, costing twenty-five cents a gallon, were sold at six-

pence the half pint. "Alas!" sighed old Philip Hone, the diarist, "how often does it prove to the deluded emigrant a land of broken promise and blasted hope!"

By 1860 one half of New York's population was foreign-born. Its 200,000 Irish made it the largest Irish city in the world; its ghetto with 150,000 Jews spreading from Park Row up the lower Bowery was one of the largest in Christendom; Astor's "radish patch" on the East Side was filling up with Germans and Bohemians packed more tightly in tenements than the evil Josefstadt quarter in Prague had ever known.

William B. Astor did not concern himself about Manhattan's backwash. The city was not so much hundreds of thousands of people as tens of thousands of lots, all laid out neatly in his plat books. New York to him was these thousands of pieces of land, each with an appraised value, a rental, a tax rating. The narrow routine that grooved him between 32 LaFayette Place, 85 Prince Street, an occasional dinner out, and Rokeby in the summer blotted out contrasts that appeared so startling to transatlantic observers.

To him tenants were of two types — those who paid their rent promptly, and those who didn't. Among the latter were those who broke his windows, soiled his walls, fouled his premises, and moved out without notice, carrying their meagre belongings in the dead of night to another abode. Only sentimentalists sympathized with such types; only visionaries like Dr. Griscom could presume to lay upon the doorstep of landlords the responsibility for the intemperance, indolence, and crime which so clearly was ingrained in the vicious natures of the slum-dwellers themselves. The slum-dwellers made the slums. If John Jacob Astor, a humble immigrant, could die the richest man in America, there was little reason why other immigrants, Irish and German, could not make a decent, respectable living.

That was the opinion generally of those who, like Astor, lived "above Bond Street." Pathetically eager, they looked to Astor to take the leadership in the battle against the mob. His guidance was sought, his verbal opinions, if ascertainable, were quoted as authoritative. But Astor was cast in no mould of

leadership. He could kindle no one's enthusiasm, nor did he wish to.

Nor could he, business-wise, assume leadership of the conservative Whig elements. A roaring landlord hurling invective upon New York's thieving demagogues would have delighted the shrewd politicians who controlled Tammany Hall. They could have whipped up a popular fury to make Astor the most hated man in America; even more important, they could have made life miserable for the Astor Estate, for they controlled the tax commissioners and the Hall of Records. Instead, as sensible men, the landlord and the politicians worked together in an understanding spirit.

It was said that a triumvirate really ran the city: Astor, Alexander T. Stewart, and Cornelius Vanderbilt — the landlord, the department-store owner, and the steamship-railroad promoter. Astor and Stewart had one interest in common: the protection and advancement of Broadway. New York was preeminently the city of one street. There stood the shops, the offices, the centre of that commerce which reached out to every four corners in the country and the four corners of the world. Its paving, its traffic, especially its tax values, were the prime political questions.

How could the relations of this trinity of wealth, to whom the better elements bowed, be adjusted to the vast proletariat which, thanks to universal suffrage, nominally held political control in their hands?

Fernando Wood had the answer. He was the most colorful personality thrown to the top of the city's turbulent political life in the mid-century — an able forerunner of Big Bill Thompson, John F. Hylan, and Jimmy Walker. Handsome, eloquent, suave to the rich, ingratiating to the poor, he was the ideal manipulator of the unruly masses. Shrewd, brilliant, and cultured, he joined hands with the landlords and bankers; but he never lost the common touch. No man could denounce more ringingly the hardships of the poor, nor provide quite such a pyrotechnic effect to the astute soothing of their discontent by harmless little political charities.

The new Republicans, combining with dissidents in Albany,

determined in 1855 to shear Mayor Wood of his control over the police department. To confute the opposition which held him responsible for vice, Mayor Wood engineered a great mass meeting. Amid the astonishment of the reformers, there marched on to the platform the city's oldest and greatest merchants, three former mayors, a galaxy of names — James W. Gerard, Peter Cooper, Commodore Vanderbilt, James Lenox, William M. Evarts, the fast-rising young star in corporation law, and Horace Greeley. The chairman read the list of honorary vice presidents for the meeting: the name of William B. Astor headed the list.

In the general confusion at this sudden alliance of wealth, respectability, and Tammany, Fernando Wood managed to retain control of the New York City police. He met his next test in the primary of 1856. The Democrats, thoroughly frightened by the rapidly increasing Republicans, were themselves split into pro-Wood and anti-Wood factions. Behind the mayor were the payrollers, the liquor interests, and the Irish vote. Because his corruption shouted from the housetops, he drew up a testimonial for himself. This document stated that he was a man of unquestionable reputation, of rare executive ability, the best mayor New York ever had. Then he solicited signatures. Bankers who held city funds in their vaults, merchants who sold supplies to the city, landlords whose tax assessments were fixed by City Hall — all were asked to sign. They did. High on the list was William B. Astor. Wood won the primary; his name, with Buchanan on the national ticket, went through easily in the final election.

His second administration has been described as the most shamelessly corrupt in municipal history — up to that time. Vice was openly advertised in the press. Thousands of homeless children wandered the streets. Policemen on their beats wondered how the respectables averted their eyes from open brothels, gambling-joints, and debauched honky-tonks. But the Astor-Stewart-Vanderbilt trinity had eyes that saw not, ears that heard not, tongues that spoke not. They were disdainful partners in Fernando Wood's machine.

James Parton, historian of the period, summed up Astor's

role: " Year after year he saw a gang of thieves in the City Hall stealing his revenues under the name of taxes and assessments but he never led an assault upon them nor gave the aid he ought to those who did. Unless he is grossly belied he preferred to compromise, not fight, and did not always disdain to court the ruffians who plundered him."

One secret of Wood's success lay in selling waterfront rights to the Astors, Goelets, Roosevelts, Dodges, and Vanderbilts " for less than New York spent to grade streets in front of the property in order to further enhance its value." That form of special privilege was not of course originated by Fernando Wood. Sound aristocratic mayors of John Jacob Astor's time had seen nothing wrong in granting him two large pieces of waterfront land in 1806; in 1808 he gained riparian rights along the land he had just bought from Vice President Clinton. In 1810 he received three more water grants and in 1828 got what was to become immensely valuable dock land between West Twelfth and West Fifteenth Streets. The city obligingly filled in the shore at the city's expense. Harsh words such as " bribery," " grabs," and " graft " were hurled at these transactions which tossed away for a song city properties potentially worth millions; indeed, a descendant of Astor, as Corporation Counsel, was to be pleading a hundred years later that the waterfront grants were invalid because the city never really possessed the right to alienate such land. Even in 1854 Common Council denounced the practice and noted that " the sale of property usually takes place about the time it is likely to be needed for public uses, or on the eve of a rise in value. Every pier, bulkhead and slip should have continued to be the property of the city."

In national politics Astor was " Straight Whig," backing Millard Fillmore in 1856 against Buchanan and Frémont, the Democratic and Republican candidates. That election ended the " Straight Whigs." As the irrepressible conflict grew nearer, propertied men in both North and South laboured to avert it. Southern gentlemen suggested the basis for compromise: to silence the abolitionists, to accept slavery as eternal on the American continent, to enact laws repressing discussion of the South's peculiar institution. Astor agreed. To him a Lincoln-Republi-

can victory meant war and he was as determined in opposition to a civil war as his father had been to the War of 1812. And yet, with the Democrat-Whigs split into three factions, it seemed obvious that Lincoln would carry New York State and the election. Fusion was the order of the day, and Astor threw himself into the battle. The *Charleston Mercury* reported sensationally that Astor had given an entire million for the Fusion campaign; the *New York Tribune,* more soberly, asserted that "four nabobs have already subscribed $25,000 each." And well they might. The prosperity of New York merchants, as European importers, rested on cotton exports to complete international payments. Shut off from the South, New York would be "no more than a fishing village." Wall Street cried out in alarm: "Without the South we are ruined." But the Empire State went Republican, and Lincoln was elected.

Wall Street nose-dived into panic; trade with the South ceased; the Southern debt of $200,000,000 or more owed Northern merchants was feared lost. The only comfort left to "the upper world of millionaire merchants, bankers, contractors, and great traders" was that the panic would prove even to Republicans that their policy was disrupting the Union. On December 18, 1860 Senator Crittenden of Kentucky introduced the last of the compromises aimed to patch the Union together. South Carolina two days later rudely tore it to pieces by seceding. Astor himself was reported circulating the Crittenden compromise at the *Herald* office. With a few others he called a meeting of thirty leaders in finance and business "unanimous in their voice for reconciliation," urging "the first steps to be taken by the North." This was followed by a wider conference of some one or two hundred "gentlemen of high position and great influence" in behalf of the compromise. Another meeting was then held in Pine Street of some two thousand Wall Streeters, with solemn mien and anxious hearts, eager to surrender every point in dispute to the South, save that of Union. Emissaries bearing the message that the gentlemen were ready to suppress the Bill of Rights and gag the North were dispatched post-haste to plead with Jefferson Davis and the governors of South Caro-

lina, Georgia, and Alabama. A new amendment was proposed to write slavery into the Constitution forever.

But when Fort Sumter was fired upon, Astor abandoned hope of peace. While his son John Jacob III worked with the Union Defense Committee, he let it be known that he was a loyal Unionist. Reports seeped behind Rebel lines into Richmond that America's wealthiest citizen had pledged $10,000,000 to the Union cause — a report as exaggerated as the *Charleston Mercury's* previous account that he had given a million to the Fusion campaign in New York.

Once the war had got going, Astor's own fears in the winter of 1860–1 that secession would ruin the metropolis vanished in the swirling prosperity. The city hummed as it never had before, what with business men laden with juicy war contracts, financiers speculating in war loans, and landlords with rooms filled to bursting. The élite who in 1860 had been willing to assure slavery forever, to turn the North into a happy hunting ground for Southern sheriffs out for fugitive slaves, and to abrogate free press, free speech, and free assembly on the matter of human servitude had by 1863 turned into enthusiastic Republicans. John Jacob III at the age of forty enlisted to serve on the staff of General McClellan.

Even the paper money which sound finance had feared turned into a boon for Astor. Under inflation, yearly rents amounted to twenty-five to fifty per cent of the purchase price of realty. With the war over and their pockets stuffed with paper money, Astor and his brother landlords and financiers attached themselves firmly to Republicanism in a solid front for " resumption " that would give their paper the value of gold.

Before the war all of William B.'s children had settled down. His oldest son, John Jacob III, who had married Charlotte Augusta Gibbes, had but one child, William Waldorf, a shy sensitive lad, intelligent and imaginative, who was being trained for his future role as head of the House of Astor.

Emily, William B.'s oldest daughter, had died in childbirth twenty years before. Her daughter, Margaret Astor Ward, married John Winthrop Chanler, an aspiring gentleman-politician

of Democratic persuasion and aristocratic background. The names of their children — John Armstrong, Winthrop Astor, William Astor, Lewis Stuyvesant, Margaret Livingston, Robert Winthrop, Elizabeth Ward, Alida Beekman, and Marion Ward — were a rollcall of the proudest in the Knickerbocker-Colonial lexicon.

Alida had married John Carey, Jr., an undistinguished but genteel Englishman who sought his fortune in America and gained it from her. On her marriage she got $200,000, plus $60,000, plus $40,000 in land, and a house and lot on West Twenty-first Street.

William B. Astor, Jr., a rather indolent young man who made no bones about business being distasteful to him, married in 1853 the glittering Caroline Schermerhorn, reared in elegance and born to rule. By 1864 Caroline had finished with child-bearing and was ready for the post-Civil-War era — that gilded age when millionaires were common and Society needed to be ruled with a distaff of gold. This Mrs. Astor determined to be *the* Mrs. Astor.

Queer among William B.'s children was Henry, who resembled his insane uncle, John Jacob II, in flying off into rages. Unable or unwilling to meet the demands of social life in the city, he retired to his father's estate at Rokeby, where he lived in the long winter months, with only his father's staff for companions.

To the third-generation Astors, and especially to Caroline Schermerhorn Astor, LaFayette Place was becoming a bit stodgy. It was still elegant and refined, but trade was pressing in around Astor Place, the American Bible Society had erected a huge structure on that busy square, the Astor Place Opera House had been turned into the Mercantile Library, and A. T. Stewart was planning to erect his Emporium of Trade just a block away, on Broadway.

So Caroline surveyed the estate and decided that the old Thompson farm, lying along Fifth Avenue under Murray Hill, would be an ideal site. She pushed her husband to ask his father for half the property on the west side of Fifth Avenue lying between Thirty-third and Thirty-fourth Streets. Soon masons and carpenters were busy erecting a four-story brownstone town

house, one of the largest and most sumptuous in the city. In 1856 the family moved in.

Mrs. John Jacob III examined the results of her pushful sister-in-law's courage in erecting a mansion along a street hitherto scarred by shanties, mean shops, and rubbage-filled empty lots. She decided that the other half of the Fifth Avenue block would be hers, and within a few years the John Jacob Astor III's were ensconced alongside the William B. Astor, Jr.'s. That put the cachet of social pre-eminence on the upper Avenue and soon old families and the newly rich were erecting brownstones as splendid as the Astors'. Mrs. William B. Astor, Jr., satisfied that she had displayed social leadership in developing upper Fifth Avenue, persuaded her husband to drop the "Backhouse" from his name, and then reached out for further triumphs.

Thanks to their women, the Astor social prestige rated ace-high. There had been those who could not stomach old Astor, what with his wretched table manners (peas on his knife and suchlike). Old Colonial doors opened hesitantly when William B. married an Armstrong who had Livingston blood; but now the Astors were interlaced with authentic Knickerbockers, the Schermerhorns, as well as those fine old Tory families the De Lanceys and the Kanes, not to mention the Carolina Gibbes, the banker Wards, the New Bedford Delanos, the Winthrop Chanlers, the Dutch Baron Boreels, the Swiss Count Rumpffs, the Russian de Nottbecks. Incomparable wealth allied with such names was enough, in democratic America, to establish the Astors within three generations as topnotch aristocrats. The fact that the fortune was rooted in real estate helped, too, in carrying on the fine old English-Colonial tradition of a landed aristocracy. So Mrs. William Astor, even though half or more of her income came from the noisome slums, never recognized A. T. Stewart, whose millions came from vulgar trade, although he erected a marble mansion across Thirty-fourth Street from her; nor Cornelius Vanderbilt, whose uncouth ferryboat manners never sullied her parlours.

Indeed, the Astors did not like now to be reminded that only a few generations back their forebears were humble people in Waldorf. The Founder, who had not a shred of disdain for hard

work or lowly origin, commissioned an artist to paint pictures of his parents, Johann Jacob and Christina. He described his father, pipe in mouth, basket in hand, selling woodcocks, and his stepmother in the market with her eggs — two simple white-haired village characters. The pictures adorned the wall of his Hellgate home.

Years later one of William B. Astor's nieces drove out to the old homestead. She spied her ancestors' pictures still hanging and took them down to her home on LaFayette Place. Uncle William chanced in one day and saw his grandparents' portraits hanging on the wall. He appeared surprised.

" Do you want them? " asked his niece.

" Yes, to burn," he answered gruffly.

CHAPTER *iv*

No Pomp, No Glory

In the sultry July of 1863 the lower depths swarmed into the streets to take revenge on Upper Tendom. History labels this revolt of the poor the "draft riots," but to William B. Astor and other men of substance it seemed more like the Paris Revolution of 1848.

The spark of protest flashed from the draft act, which confined conscription to the poor, but the tinder lay in resentment against a war whose issues seemed shadowy and distant but whose profiteering in food, rents, and clothing touched the tenements intimately. People packed 290,000 to the square mile in a density more choking than Bombay or Canton listened eagerly to flaming tribunes — anonymous leaders of misery — who cried that if they must fight, let them fight against their oppressors.

For three days the slums held off the police. Hated draft offices and their records became columns of fire and smoke, the office of the *Tribune* was gutted, the police were hemmed into their headquarters. Armed with paving blocks and pillaged rifles, the rebels fought running battles with hastily mobilized volunteers, barricaded themselves in the narrow streets, lynched Negroes — hapless symbols of war and draft. Only the arrival of seasoned federal troops quelled the revolt. No record could be made of the casualties; some said a thousand had been killed.

The news chilled the blood of the Astors in Rokeby, of the wealthy gathered at Saratoga and Newport. As they seeped back into the city with cooler weather, anxious conferences

were held. Repression and reform were the watchwords. The *New York Times* several years later, when it could be told, editorialized:

"We have a seething, ignorant, passionate, half-criminal class which possesses no property and can get none. . . . Let some such opportunity occur as was . . . afforded by the absence of our middle class militia during the Civil War; let this mighty throng hear that there was a chance to grasp the luxuries of wealth, or to divide the property of the rich, or to escape labor and suffering for a time, and live on the superfluities of others, and we should see a sudden storm of communistic revolution in New York such as would astonish all who do not know these classes. In 1863 our readers will remember the phrases not only of the rioters but of the laboring class which passed in whispers from mouth to mouth among our comfortable houses, showing a far deeper and wider discontent fermenting among the working and servant people than dissatisfaction with a draft or hatred of the Negro. It needed only one or two actions then to have lighted such a conflagration in New York and kindled such a revolution as this generation would not easily have recovered from."

Reform for which the *Times* appealed took two channels, one to curtail the voting privileges of non-property-holders, the other to ameliorate slum conditions. The journalist N. P. Willis had written of those July days:

"The high brick blocks of closely packed houses where the mobs originated seemed to be literally hives of sickness and vice. It was wonderful to see and difficult to believe that so much misery, disease and wretchedness could be huddled together and hidden by high walls, unvisited and unthought of, so near our own abodes. . . . To walk the streets as we walked them in those hours of conflagration and riot was like witnessing the Day of Judgment, with every unchecked thing revealed, every sin and sorrow blazingly glared upon, every hidden abomination laid before hell's expectant fire."

During the winter of 1863–4 the better elements formed the Citizens Association. On its general committee sat John Jacob III representing his father, and Franklin H. Delano, his brother-

in-law. The Association asked a group of medical men to sit on its committee on hygiene and public health to examine the slums. Dividing the city into inspection districts, the doctors set out, with reporters, to see what slum life was like.

In the 17th Ward, where Astor had just erected blocks of six-story tenements, they found gutters overflowing with filth exhaling "miasmata." Cholera infantum swept the ward in summer; in winter, measles, smallpox, scarlatina. Croton water had been piped into tenement yards, but only half the buildings had water on each floor, and usually that "meant nothing" because pressure was too low to force it beyond the second or third floor. There were of course no water closets; tenants used backyard privies or "school sinks" — privies through which water was turned once or twice a day.

Such facts inclined the better elements to the view that something ought to be done. Even the *Real Estate Record* protested against "the infamous and neglectful manner in which our tenement houses are constructed; these infamous dens of discomfort and disease in which human beings are herded together like beasts, with no other purpose than to grasp the greatest number of dollars out of the greatest number of people crowded under one roof, and where no attempt whatever is made to secure scientific or effective ventilation." The slum-dwellers, said the *Real Estate Record*, "live the lives of rats." Of the Astor and Trinity property on the West Side the *Record* complained that it was "cumbered with wretched two-story tenements, unfit for decent human beings to live in," and recommended that corporations buy up the property, raze the dwellings, and erect better buildings.

"Houses are so scarce," complained *Harper's Magazine*, "that landlords see tenants running around, like pigs in the land of Cockaigne, with knives and forks in their backs, begging to be eaten."

But what happened when Astor did build anew was described by the Citizens Association doctors. On the old "radish patch" that the Founder had bought, his son erected in post-Civil-War days block after block of six-story tenements, inhabited by Germans and Bohemians who swarmed into the

First Avenue and Avenue A district. Long, narrow, dark hallways reeking of the odours of cooking, garbage, and refuse led to four apartments on each floor. Only the rooms fronting the street or court had direct light; the interior rooms were either dark or lighted by transoms. Ventilation was possible only by opening the door on the dark, nauseous hallway. As with his other slum properties, Astor leased these new tenements to sub-landlords.

The State Legislature, once again prodded into an investigation, enacted in 1867 the first tenement-house law in New York's two hundred and fifty years. Not more than sixty per cent of the lot, according to the new statute, could be built on.

The contractors' and landlords' lobby descended on Albany with a demand that the sixty-per-cent limit on building area be stricken out. With land prices soaring, the lobby argued, New York needed all the land it could lay its hands on. Arbitrarily to condemn forty per cent of a lot to be useless was a criminal injustice against the workingman, for it meant he must pay higher rents.

Legislative records fail to reveal the testimony at hearings on the building law in 1872, if indeed hearings were held. All that is known is that the Legislature refused, on the one hand, to repeal the sixty-per-cent limitation; on the other hand, it gave the New York Board of Health discretionary power to modify legal requirements. The Board of Health obliged, and New York in the 1870's saw the triumph of the new "railroad flat" tenements extending to ninety feet and more of hundred-foot lots, blotting out eternally any chance for sun, light, and air to penetrate below the top stories. Not only were all rooms except those facing the street or the court deprived of light, but the windows of the rear rooms looked out on a blank brick wall that might be only ten or twenty feet away. Beneath the top stories of the six-flight walk-ups, the courts were dark wells in whose bottoms stank refuse, garbage, filth, and dead animals.

The very plan of Manhattan conspired with legislators, landlords, and contractors to rob slum-dwellers of that which presumably no man could take from them — the air, the sun, the light of day. In a way the worst calamity that ever befell New

York was the monumental mistake made in 1811 when the street plan was adopted. Amid much raillery, the street commissioners platted Manhattan beyond Greenwich Village and up to Harlem into a gridiron of streets and avenues. While critics jeered at the idea that New York would ever extend, at most, beyond what was platted as Fortieth Street, the commissioners themselves conceded that "it is improbable that for centuries to come the grounds north of the Haerlem flats will be covered with houses."

That was their fundamental mistake, for they platted a city whose traffic was to move from river to river along a multitude of narrow streets, cut by only a dozen avenues running from north to south. The result was long, thin blocks, themselves divided into long, thin lots, 25 by 100 feet, with no alleys, a paradise for real-estate owners, an inferno for real-estate users. The best house that could be built on such a lot would be 25 feet wide and 50 feet deep, with a garden behind. But even the interior rooms of such a house would be dark. When, in the post-war period the Astors and others began to build six-story tenements — 25 feet wide and 64 to 90 and 95 feet deep, the majority of tenement-dwellers were condemned to lose even the free air and sun. In any case the long blocks faced north and south, so it was obvious that the north half would never get sunlight. It seemed as if some diabolic spirit presided over the destinies of the city to assure a minimum of nature's free gifts to its residents.

But the casual passer-by could not detect that. All he saw were the uniform brick rows, their entrances often adorned with carved stone, their doorways arched with some regard to beauty, their roofs surmounted by ornate cornices. If he looked more closely, he might observe from the windows that the rooms could be hardly more than seven or eight feet high, but he could not guess that many were tiny, ever darkened cells, nor could anyone see the fetid stairwells, for they were eternally murky (a trap, as pious persons said, for virtuous girls), nor the wooden staircases which condemned scores annually to horrible death by fire, nor the so-called ventilating flues which ascended pathetically from the majority of interior rooms to

the roof, nor the Stygian courts behind, fit only for dead cats.

The interest of the Citizens Association in sanitary conditions in the tenements gave way to another expression of post-draft-riot reform: an effort to make one part of the city's bicameral council exclusively a landholders' organ, consisting of taxpayers on at least $30,000 worth of property, selected by citizens paying taxes on at least $5,000 in real estate; all city expenditures to be approved by three fourths of both chambers (a jury of taxpayers on property of not less than $20,000 already having passed on the council's budget, striking out or reducing expenditures), and the mayor to have a final unchallengeable veto power. This was a bit too bold, so the Citizens Association was back with a proposal that Astor, A. T. Stewart, Judge Roosevelt, and the president of Trinity Church Corporation be created as a board of audit with power to reject bills and charges against the city. But already New York was convulsed with the Tweed Ring exposé involving Astor's son, John Jacob III, and the Citizens Association itself, and so nothing came of the proposal.

Post-war politics involved the readjustment of men such as Astor to the new shift in power. After Lincoln's assassination the cream of New York's wealth, headed by Astor, journeyed to Washington to vow loyalty to Andrew Johnson. But the surrender at Appomattox had strengthened the radical wing of the new party. Men of property looked about for the candidate in 1868 who could establish "Straight Whig" principles. The stakes were large, revolving around the question who was to pay for the war, and how. It was more greenbacks versus gold resumption; easy credit and soft money for the West and debtors against hard money for the holders of bonds and greenbacks.

The "practical" Republicans, led by that wily manipulator Thurlow Weed from his offices in the Astor House, decided to push the fortunes of Ulysses S. Grant, the hero of the time and the first full General in American history. They decided that his mind could be trained on unfamiliar problems of finance to agree with theirs. Astor joined other Manhattan magnates in a Cooper Union rally for Grant and in unprecedented campaign gifts.

On the legal front Astor was instrumental in pushing the fight

against the war-imposed income tax. In 1865 the nation's biggest taxpayer, on an income of $1,300,000, he resented the continuance of an iniquitous impost that penalized wealth. His confidential lawyer, Charles F. Southmayd, prepared the brief to be pleaded before the Supreme Court by William M. Evarts, himself a lawyer for the Astor Estate. They won on the grounds that the tax was unconstitutional, and the country had to wait until 1913 to tap directly the pockets of the rich.

In all the years since his father's death in 1848, Astor had trod the dull routine of a landlord's life, his friendships few, his joys confined to family and books. Although he bought and sold quietly in Civil War bonds and was an influential holder of Delaware & Hudson, New York Central, and other gilt-edge stocks and bonds, he did not speculate on the Exchange. Not for him the nervous strain and stress of the stock market, which was making and unmaking scores of millionaires in post-war years.

Astor was that type, rare in America although common enough in England, the mole-capitalist, burrowing his way undramatically through land to more wealth without benefit of newspaper headlines, showy splendour, or outward political pomp. He never went near Wall Street or Newport; his name was connected with no great or novel enterprise; he refused to pontificate for the press. Although he was the city's leading landlord, no building he erected was noteworthy, no tenement of his excited admiration. It was said of him that he sat in his office as if it were a house of detention to which his father had condemned him for life.

He might have travelled, as his father did, for pleasure. But the only transatlantic voyage recorded after his university days was that in 1857 when he visited with his Göttingen mentor, now the famous Baron von Bunsen. Two years before, he had written Bunsen of his intention of revisiting Europe. Bunsen wrote his wife: " I have for many years wished for a renewal of our old acquaintance. I had bestowed much love upon him, and he had considered and acknowledged me as his guide. He now writes with real friendship. I shall answer him as soon as I am again at Heidelberg — using '*du*' as of old."

At last Astor, whose fame as the wealthiest man in the New World must have impressed Europe more than it did New York, arrived. Bunsen wrote: "I have been expecting Astor daily and at last he arrived yesterday evening at the same time with the Prince of Wales. Astor's faithful attachment to me and the impression we received of his excellence give us true pleasure."

To Bunsen it seemed strange that his friend did not want to tarry for a "thorough renewal of intercourse and interchange of thought and opinion," that after a few short days they should "have to part for life." But Astor was on a grand tour with his wife and had no time to spare. Living over old memories might have been more galling than pleasurable.

In 1870 he was the last of the second-generation Astors. His sister Dorothea Langdon died in 1853; in 1869 the unknown Astor, John Jacob II, died unchronicled in his mansion-hospital at Ninth Avenue and Fourteenth Street. Irishwomen crossed themselves rapidly when they passed the high stone wall which hid the gardens of this unfortunate man. Occasionally John Jacob II had fared forth behind his physician-guardian; if he became rude or noisy, his companion had only to raise his finger: "Astor, be a man."

A contemporary told a curious story about the physician. His salary, set by old Astor at five thousand dollars, appeared too high to prudent William. The doctor cancelled his life contract and a new guardian was appointed. John Jacob II was furious. He smashed windows, broke up the furniture, and moaned for his old master. A large man, he was beyond any constraint but a straitjacket. In desperation his brother finally appealed to the old physician to resume. That gentleman declined. He had, he said, practically signed away the right to live his own life and then had been dismissed for mercenary reasons. He was now a free man and intended so to remain. But he yielded when William B. agreed to give him ten thousand dollars a year; and John Jacob II returned to normalcy.

When he died in 1869, his estate, grown immensely valuable, was divided, according to the Founder's will, among the children of William B. Astor and Dorothea Langdon. A negligible increment to William B.'s offspring, it proved a welcome rein-

forcement to the Langdons, who always felt they had fared poorly in the split-up of the Founder's estate.

In 1872 Mrs. William B. Astor, who had imbued the Astors with Armstrong-Livingston blood, died after a quiet life devoted to her children and good works, "having given away a fortune among the poor," as the Reverend Charles Loring Brace put it. Founder of the Children's Aid Society, the Reverend Mr. Brace recorded Mrs. Astor's $50 as its first large gift. She had served on the board of the Association for the Relief of Respectable Aged Indigent Females, had patronized the Methodist Church near Rokeby, and been secretary directress for many years to the New York Woman's Hospital. In 1855 she gave $200, the hospital's biggest donation, and later gave $100 a year. Once her gift mounted to $1,000 and the hospital noted that "early and late she worked to promote its usefulness in every way."

Astor was badly broken up by his wife's death. He could no longer bear to live in his old house on LaFayette Place and moved to Fifth Avenue, a block above his sons. While the unearthly quiet within his old home appalled him, it is likely, too, that the noise without was becoming distasteful. For the city, over the protests of the Astors, Stewarts, Roosevelts, and Lorillards, had transformed the once quiet Place into a thoroughfare by cutting it through to the south. That doomed LaFayette as an aristocratic retreat. All that remained to remind passers-by of its former glory were the collaterals — the Langdons and Wilkses — together with the Astor Library and Colonnade Row, turned into a hotel.

By that time Astor had moved his daughters, Laura Delano and Alida Carey, and his granddaughter Margaret Astor Ward Chanler, into fitting homes on Madison Avenue at Thirty-fourth, a block away from their brothers' mansions on Fifth Avenue. Mrs. Chanler and her growing family used Rokeby in the summer. Rokeby, too, had lost some of its rural peacefulness, for the Hudson River Railroad had fought its way up the banks of the river despite the embattled Dutchess gentry.

In the 1870's Astor was becoming as remote a figure in his native city as his father had been thirty years before. His son

John Jacob III having taken over active management of the estate, the old man came into the office for only a few hours each day. Shopkeepers who for fifty years had known the time of day by observing Astor's walks to and from his office now saw that he passed in a carriage. About "the man nobody knew" there were few anecdotes. The name of the richest man in the country was rarely in the papers. No reporter would have dreamed of piercing the funereal Astor Estate offices to interview "the Landlord of New York"; both he and his son kept severely to the rule that Astors are not interviewed. Their business was their own and they had nothing to say that would interest the public.

Astor was spared his father's ignominous decline in protracted old age. His usual even temper, it was said, began to give way to irascibility. At other times his mind seemed clouded; perhaps again he was under the trees at Göttingen fencing or talking philosophy with Bunsen and Schopenhauer. One November day he was puttering about his office. He felt chilled and called his carriage. Two days later he knew his end was near.

"I might have lived another year if I had not caught this cold," he said; "but I am satisfied to go now. I am 84 years old — long past the allotted time of man — and at my age, life becomes a burden." He died November 24, 1875, at half past nine in the morning, of pneumonia.

The funeral at Trinity Chapel was attended by the aristocracy: the pallbearers included former Governor John A. Dix, Thomas W. Ludlow, founder of the New York Life Insurance and Trust Company; Albert Gallatin, Daniel Lord, Samuel B. Ruggles, J. Carroll Brevoort, William Hopper, and Judge Charles P. Daly. Bishop Potter, aided by the Reverend Morgan Dix, rector of Trinity, and three other clergymen, conducted the services. The body was placed in the family's monumental tomb at Trinity Cemetery, far up Manhattan Island.

Thus passed William Backhouse Astor, and men had difficulty in persuading themselves that here indeed lay the richest American. Whatever the promise of his youth, he merited in full the unjust gibe against John Jacob Astor: he was in truth

a money-making machine, as impersonal a personification of great wealth as ever lived, a kind of "ideal economic man" without juice. Against his father's soaring ambition, he was content to brood over his acres; against his father's dogged will, he had but to count the money that poured in unceasing and increasing; beside his father's broad humour and intense vitality, he seemed bloodless, a kind of barely human device to receive John Jacob Astor's rents and to pass on the Founder's heritance to John Jacob Astor III and his brother.

Peter Cooper, himself eighty-five, talked of his contemporary who had years before declined to lend money at less than seven per cent to enable the ironmaster to push the construction of his pet philanthropy, Cooper Union. No one, said old Cooper, knew much about Astor because he spent his time either in his office or in his library. To compare him with his father would be disparaging, to speak of his charities would be to speak of that which nobody knew, aside from the wing of the Astor Library. And so Peter Cooper, and other men, when they talked about him, talked of his wealth. Cooper, an optimist by nature, believed him to be worth $200,000,000. The *Sun's* more sober estimate placed his realty at $30,000,000, his personalty at $10,000,000.

The newspapers brushed about for anecdotes to illustrate Astor's personality, but they were few. One related that a poor preacher, a former classmate, called on him one day for old time's sake. Astor looked coldly across his desk and asked: "Can I do anything for you?"

"No, sir," said the preacher, picking up his umbrella and bowing himself out of the room.

In the disposition of his property Astor, as in all things, trod in the footsteps of his father. To his orphaned granddaughter, Margaret Astor Ward Chanler, went $700,000 in cash, the estate of Rokeby, a fine $100,000 house on Madison Avenue, and valuable Fifth Avenue property.

His two daughters, Laura Delano and Alida Carey, each received some $1,100,000 in cash and property, and their husbands, Franklin H. Delano and John Carey, were made executors of his will.

The main stream of the estate, then, would go to his sons. The youngest, Henry, the queer one, could hardly share alike with John Jacob III and William. So in lieu of his third he received $150,000 outright and $200,000 in trust, in addition to the quarter share in the Eden farm willed him by the Founder.

"I declare," his father explained of the uneven inheritances of his daughters and Henry, "that the inequalities between the property appropriated to them and that to my sons, John and William, are not owing to any difference in my affections, respect, esteem and regard for them but inasmuch as they all receive very ample fortunes, I have intended to relieve them from the care and exposures which a larger fortune would carry with it."

The "affections, respect, esteem and regard" in which Henry was held sank catastrophically when in 1871 he defied all the conventions of the Astor family and concluded a morganatic marriage with a peasant's daughter in Dutchess County. The $150,000 gift was reduced to $30,000, the $200,000 trust fund revoked. In sorrow and anger, Astor wrote his ninth codicil:

"My son, Henry, having recently formed a matrimonial connection under peculiar circumstances without my knowledge and in such a rank in life as that the large property derived by him under deeds executed by my father, and the beneficial use or income of which is absolutely secured to him, will be more than adequate for all useful purposes of himself and any family he may have in the condition of life he has chosen for himself, I think it proper to revoke and annul to the extent hereinafter specified the disposition in his favor or for his benefit or for the benefit of his issue."

To John Jacob III and William went everything remaining — the Astor Estate. The half of the estate which the Founder had given absolutely in fee simple to William B. went in trust to the two sons; the half which the Founder had tied up in trust for William B. was given in fee simple to the two sons. One half of the Astor Estate they might squander, but one half would be held intact for their heirs, an anchor against human weaknesses.

The two sons shared equally except that John Jacob III, as

the new head of the House of Astor, received his grandfather's French plate and his portrait. The new head, too, was wealthier by far than his brother, for the Founder had given him half the Eden farm, that gem of the Astor Estate which lay north of Forty-second Street and west of Broadway, and only quarter portions to William and Henry.

In his original will of 1856 Astor paid his tribute (aside from the Astor Library) to philanthropy, and never in the nine codicils he signed later did he add anything. His gifts were:

American Bible Society, $10,000;

The Society for the Relief of Respectable Aged Indigent Females, $5,000;

The Institute for the Blind, $5,000;

The Lying-in Asylum, $5,000;

The Ladies' Depository, $5,000;

The Exempt Firemen's Benevolent Fund, $10,000.

These bequests totalled $40,000. To four employees he gave $2,500 each.

To the Astor Library he gave $250,000 (already long since spent), and by a codicil $200,000 more.

During his life he had given $50,000 to help build St. Luke's Hospital, $500 toward a pavilion at the Woman's Hospital, and $100 annually to the Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor.

His philanthropies and non-family bequests thus totalled exactly $500,000, about the same as his father's. But his father gave from an estate estimated at $20,000,000; he gave from $40,000,000. Nevertheless, this .0125 per cent of genuflection to the public welfare earned him the comment " Am. philan." in the index to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*!

The New York press of 1875 hardly agreed with the *Britannica*. The *Evening Post* read the will " with regret if not with surprise." " The testator was the representative of an old New York family; the vast estate which he controlled was situated within the city; its growth had been dependent upon the growth of the city. It may have been reasonably expected, therefore, that local public institutions would have been remembered liberally in the disposition of his property." If the $40,000

given to "city charities had been wholly forgotten the public disappointment perhaps would have been less." The *Express* used the heading: "A Millionaire's Mite." The *Sun*, commenting on his gifts to the Astor Library, noted the absence of an "absorbing interest" reflected in the serious defects in the library. "Mr. Astor did not seem to have been possessed any more by this than by any other enthusiasm." If his heirs will look after the library, the *Sun* added, "it will prove the highest, if only, right the Astor family has to public honor. A thousand blocks of houses and square miles of lots will not entitle them to remembrance as useful and public-spirited citizens; but a perfect library, open to students at all times, will make the Astor name a name of lasting honor."

Attacks on great wealth such as his "discourage industry and enterprise," the *Sun* warned. "Selfish motives are powerful and unselfish ones weak." Sooner or later some Astor would let go the money — "and Heaven send us such a one soon! — having a taste for good architecture and building streets of houses which shall be at once grateful to the eye and convenient to dwell in."

To the *World* it seemed that the very lack of admiration elicited by the departed proved that social life in the New World was still healthy and democratic; certainly the Astors did not menace American institutions.

The magazines were more critical. Of Astor's great fortune, the *Observer* asked: "What use has he made of it? Beyond the increase of one library, founded by his father, what has he done, in the life of 80 years, in the midst of the city that he has lived in all his life, to make it better, nobler, happier? What poor men wept when he died?"

The *Independent* eulogized his prudent industry but deplored his failure "to beautify his native city." "Compared with ordinary men, his public benefactions were large, it must be admitted; but when his vast opportunities are remembered, his returns to the public from whom his wealth was derived, seem very small."

Appleton's Journal was more severe: "A great real estate owner, like the late Mr. Astor, becomes enormously rich solely

by the fortuitous circumstances that surround him — by the energies, industries, enterprises, and achievements of his neighbors. . . . The wealth of the late Mr. Astor was not won *by* him, it was conferred *upon* him. . . . The people of New York had a right to expect that one who, like the late Mr. Astor, had become enormously rich under the circumstances we have described, would leave a noble and handsome bequest to the city whose remarkable growth has been the real force that produced his wealth. . . .

"Mr. Astor, it is said, counted his buildings by the thousands. The stranger wandering through the city, would naturally expect to find at least a few architectural piles erected by the taste and munificence of the wealthiest man in the country. With the exception of the Astor Library, there are none. No schools, no academies, no churches, no public pleasure grounds bear his name. The wealth of this great millionaire is not even evidenced in useful or economical things. The best form of house for the laboring man is one of the problems of the day. Mr. Astor, with all his great resources, made no effort to solve it. No model tenements went up under his inspiration; no pretty or tasteful rows of cottages were devised by his hand; no contribution whatever toward the solution of questions in the economy of the home ever came from him. He made no experiments, acquired no experience, contributed no results, set no needed example even in the domain of house building, into which his accumulated wealth ever steadily went."

E. L. Godkin of the *Nation*, appraising him as a citizen, noted that he was a "successful accumulator of property to whom all political questions were mere wind and fury signifying nothing." "The whole vast accumulation of property by two generations of Astors has been accomplished in defiance of this theory of the duty of the citizen [to be active in politics] and you would hardly at any time during Mr. William B. Astor's long life have persuaded him that there was anything in it. The Astor property was accumulated by men whose first maxim, in practice at any rate, was that the merchant or capitalist who had anything to do with politics except so far as to make himself secure against oppression or over-taxation, stultified himself and

directly diminished by the amount of his political activity his chances of success in business. The property which the late Mr. Astor possessed would have enabled him, had he felt inclined, to make the attempt to exercise a very large share of the political power of the city in which he lived but his political life and ambition were confined to a quiet resolution that whatever party or ring might be in power it should not harm his capital or income. Within these limits submission to the ruling powers, no matter of what stripe, was his simple plan and was adhered to as steadily as if he had been living under a despotism instead of in a free country."

Demarest Lloyd, writing in the *Independent*, praised the thrifty millionaire but deplored the tradition which tied up his fortune in his family. " Has any man the *right* to leave his eldest son 20 or 30 millions of dollars? " he asked. " The man who has 20 millions cannot eat more oysters, or drink any more wine, or wear any more clothes than the man who has one million. . . . Why should he cling to a fortune which so much exceeds the wants of himself and those about him? " " When," he asked, " shall we have a rich man who will also be great? "

Over in London the *Spectator* speculated on the strange phenomenon of William B. Astor. " We rather wonder why one feels a slight contempt for a career like this — a contempt deepened rather than lessened by the charm which very great wealth, like very great power, has for the imagination. . . . One feels in his case an extreme sense of disappointment, as if, living in such a country, with such a family history, he ought to have been more original, more splendid, generous, more of a recognized benefactor to his kind. It is as if Napoleon in the fullness of power had used his whole strength to make himself a safe and decorous sovereign in some small corner of his possessions — had made a warm cloak of his purple robe, and a handsome crutch of his sceptre.

" A man is not bound to be lofty, if loftiness is not in him, but there is in the career of Mr. Astor, excellent person that he is always reputed to have been, a want of greatness which power like his would in some natures have called forth."

BOOK THREE

JOHN JACOB ASTOR III

CHAPTER *i*

The First Aristocrat

JOHN JACOB III was the first head of the House of Astor to be born in luxury and destined to rule. He was the first to feel blue blood — that of the Armstrongs and Livingstons — coursing through his veins, the first whose hands were uncontaminated by vulgar trade and earthy commerce, the first trained from earliest youth to think in terms of wealth, privilege, and caste. He was first, too, in having for his wife a social queen, ablaze with diamonds, the gracious, cultured lady. Even the English nobility was obliged to admit that at last birth and breeding had combined with enormous wealth to create an American aristocrat.

The new Astor, rich as Crœsus, lordly as the Duke of Westminster, full six feet tall, erect, well-rounded, his ruddy face set off with moustache and flowing side whiskers, might well have stepped out of an English Tory Cabinet. The Astor shyness, which had driven his father into the seclusion of his library, became in John Jacob III a cold and imperious hauteur separating him from the lower breed, but admitting gentlemen of equal status into a formal, always dignified association. He was indeed the perfect mid-Victorian gentleman. If, like his father, he was locked up within himself, at least he walked as one born to the purple. To the populace he became the symbol of masterful wealth, aloof and austere as Jove, imperial in his style of living, generous in his charities, rock-ribbed in his High Church, regular Republican orthodoxy.

Much of the picture he presented to the world had been painted in by his wife, fragile, charming, warm-hearted Augusta

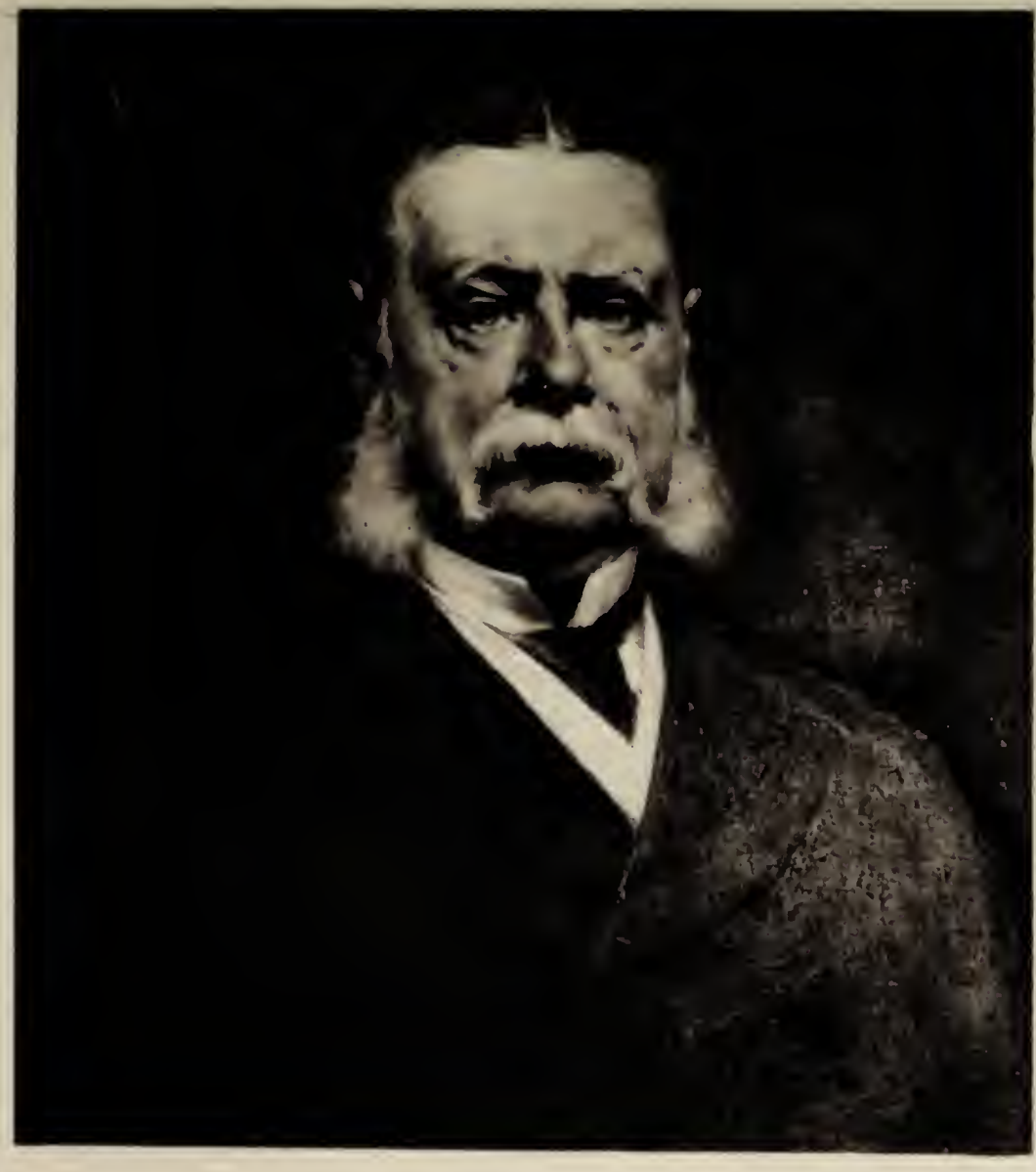
Gibbes. She softened her lord's heart, loosened his purse-strings, dressed him to match his wealth and power, weaned him away from parsimony. The new Astors must live on Fifth Avenue, have their villa in Newport, entertain magnificently, cover their walls with rich paintings, accept the social leadership which was meaningless to the first John Jacob, repugnant to William B.

Fifty-three years old when his father died, this Astor too had long been harnessed to the yoke of the Estate. His sole release from a life concerned with leases and lawsuits, buildings and rentals, was afforded by the Civil War — " the only exciting years " of his existence.

In striking contrast to his father's agonized search for a compromise which would ward off war, young John Jacob became an ardent apostle of Lincoln in those ticklish months before inauguration when the nation stood poised on the awful brink. When South Carolina trained its guns on Fort Sumter, he sprang to the defence, paying three thousand dollars to dispatch the tugboat *Yankee* to the relief of the beleaguered garrison. As such he was said to have been the first citizen of New York to make a financial contribution to Union defence.

When the horrid war broke, he threw himself into the organization of the Union Defense Committee to offset the copperhead city government's reluctance to raise volunteers, and became chairman of the subcommittee on the purchase of arms and ammunition. On May 21, 1861 he wrote Simon Cameron, Secretary of War, offering to send rifled cannon to Fort Pickens. Back the next day came a telegram almost rude in its command that " the Committee will therefore please forward no ordnance to Fort Pickens." Young Astor was pained by the sharp tone of the bureaucratic letter, and Secretary Cameron found it wise to mollify him.

That winter Astor volunteered and became a full-fledged colonel, attaching himself with other gentlemen, including the Comte de Paris and the Duc de Chartres, to Major General McClellan's staff in the Army of the Potomac. He rented a house in Washington and staffed it with a competent chef, steward, and valet. " Little Mac, the Young Napoleon," fresh



JOHN JACOB ASTOR III (1822-1890)

the first son of William Backhouse Astor. Birth and breeding combined with enormous wealth to create an American aristocrat.

PHOTO, BROWN BROTHERS

MRS. JOHN JACOB ASTOR III

(née Charlotte Augusta Gibbes). First of the great ladies in the Astor family, charming, warm-hearted, philanthropic

PHOTO, CULVER SERVICE

from successes in western Virginia, had been summoned east to shape the mob that had fled Bull Run into a fighting force capable of defeating the Army of Virginia and ending the war. McClellan decided to capture Richmond from the Peninsula, and Colonel Astor was placed in charge of recording all information on the transports that were to take the troops to the new front. McClellan then dallied for the siege of Yorktown, but the rebels suddenly decided to offer no battle and withdrew. Colonel Astor sent a report up to New York on the abandonment of the Confederate defences which praised his General highly, but military opinion later was that the enemy had just "skedaddled again." When Little Mac got in sight of Richmond, he got an attack of the "slows," Robert E. Lee took command of the Confederates, and then began the bloody retreat. On a tour of inspection which led unexpectedly into enemy fire, Astor drew this tribute from a fellow officer: "I am only a poor soldier with nothing but my sword; but if I had been the heir of the Astor fortune and estate, I would have run away if I had been hanged for it."

McClellan returned from the Peninsula under a cloud and was relieved of his command. Now he needed no aides-de-camp and so Colonel Astor resigned on July 10, 1862, his service totalling eight months. It was plain, though, that Astor, a "black" Republican, did not share the feeling that the Democrat, McClellan, had deliberately refused to strike decisive blows against the Rebels. In November 1863 he asked the General to accept the presidency of the "New Jersey R. Rd. and Transportation Company." McClellan, who had been chief engineer for the Illinois Central, declined; he had bigger fish to fry in leading the Democratic ticket in 1864 against Lincoln.

At the end of the war Astor was brevetted a brigadier general, but he preferred his colonelcy. In later years he joined with comrades of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion as a Companion of the first class to recall the old battle days, the high hopes of the Peninsular campaign, the privations and bivouacs, the forlorn appearance and redoubtable qualities of the enemy. Those days, he said, were the best of his life.

Despite her South Carolina ancestry, his wife stood loyally

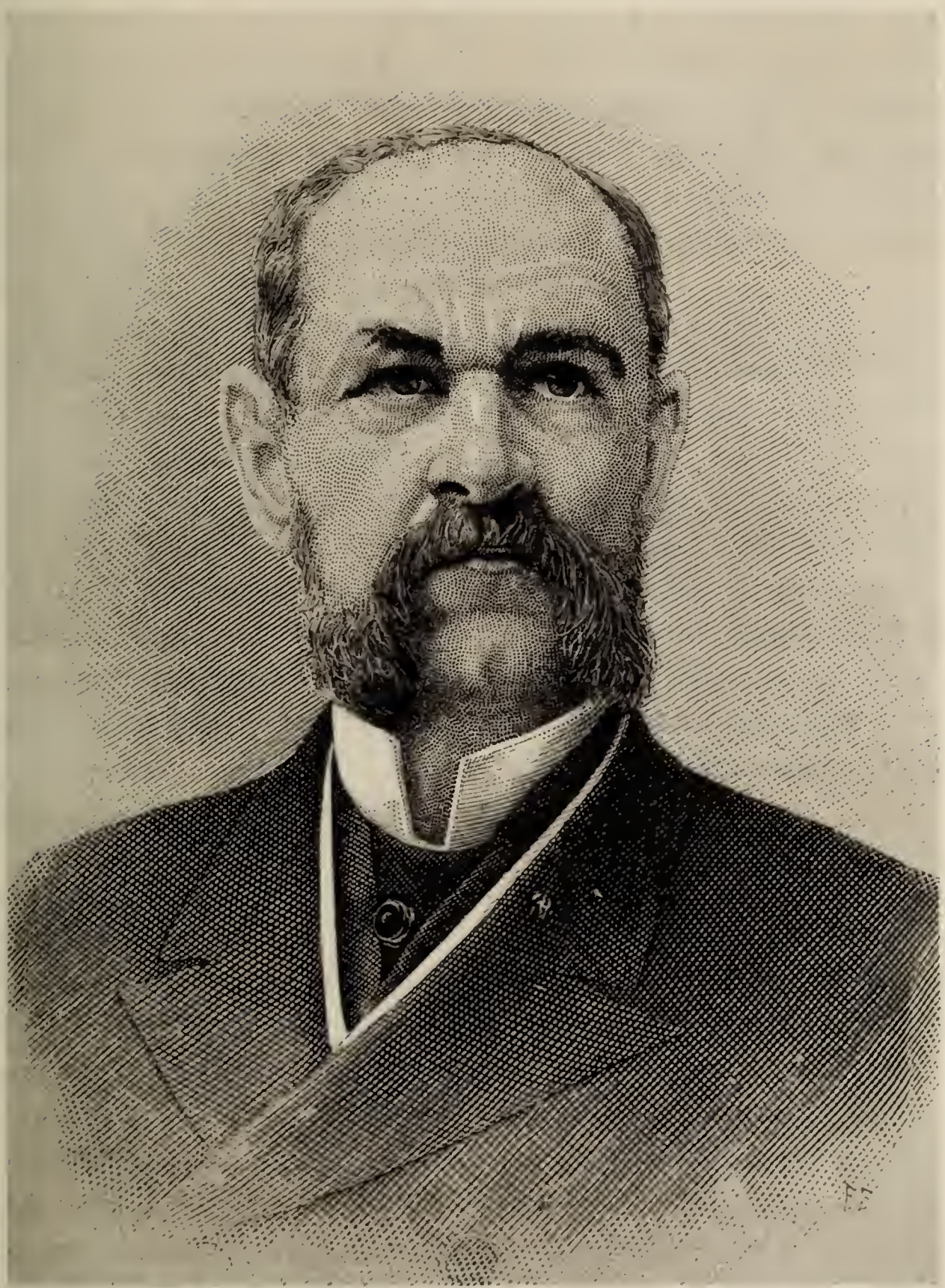
by the Union. She presented a stand of colours to the Ellsworth Zouaves, lusty lads who rioted in their magnificent baggy trousers in New York and in the south wing of the Capitol and were finally — the despair of the generals — about to be shipped south on a boat without provisions when General Chester A. Arthur intervened at the last moment to prevent starvation at sea as a penalty for insubordination.

To the anger and disgust of the Irish of New York and the dismay of Southern gentlemen, Mrs. Astor and other society ladies encouraged the recruiting of the 20th Regiment, U. S. coloured troops. Presenting the colours, she commanded her soldiers:

"When you look at this flag and rush to battle, or stand at guard beneath its sublime motto, 'God and Liberty,' remember that it is also an emblem of love and honor from the daughters of this great metropolis to her brave champions in the field, and that they will anxiously watch your career, glory in your heroism, and minister to you when wounded and ill, and honor your martyrdom with benediction and tears."

The honour and glory of war were not for John Jacob's younger brother, William. Although he raised a regiment among the peasantry of Dutchess County, his father forbade him to go to the front. Reluctantly William turned back his colonelcy and stayed at home. That indeed was William's fate, to be the younger son in a family which prized primogeniture. His brother, coming head of the House, was favoured by his father, consulted by men of affairs and politicians, for he bore the talismanic name of John Jacob Astor.

It was William's misfortune, too, that his wife loomed so large beside him. Caroline Schermerhorn Astor, proud of her Knickerbocker ancestors, contemptuous alike of her husband's inferior blood and his inferior position in the Astorian scheme of things, was determined that she should make the name of William Astor — or at any rate of *Mrs.* William Astor — shine with peculiar refulgence. It was her first triumph, after bearing four daughters, to mother a son whose name would be *the* name of the family — John Jacob IV. That accomplished, she laid childbearing to one side and gave herself to Society.



WILLIAM B. ASTOR (1829-1892)

the second son of William Backhouse Astor, after whom he was named. First of the decadent Astors, he would have neither his wife's society-bound nor his brother's office-bound life.

To William, a genial enough fellow but uninterested in the social world or indeed any world except that which converged upon himself, Society was a bore. He withdrew from the whirl whose vortex was 350 Fifth Avenue, built himself a splendid estate in Dutchess County near Rhinebeck which he named Ferncliff, devoted himself to horses in the spring and autumn, to Florida in the winter (he was one of the Yankee pioneers in Jacksonville), and to his yacht in summer.

His older brother might well be the first aristocratic Astor, burdened with military, social, political, and financial honours; *he* would be the first of the decadent Astors, happily free of the humdrum of real estate, free of business in any sense, free of his formidable wife, free to live in a pleasure world of his own making. Let Caroline and his sister-in-law amuse themselves playing the grand ladies in their fine Dowdy-Dreary mansions on Fifth Avenue. Let the high red wall which surrounded the Astor palaces keep hoi-polloi from peering into the gardens of the most exclusive block belonging to the " most exclusive family in New York." He would have neither his wife's society-bound nor his brother's office-bound life.

Not that John Jacob III carried the weight of the Astor fortune quite so laboriously as did either his grandfather or his father. He knew well enough that the estate would go on whether or not any member of the family darkened the door of the new offices, elegant, dignified, restrained, which had just been built on West Twenty-sixth Street off Broadway. But he dabbled in Wall Street a bit, was associated in railroad and coal and iron properties with the other financial lords of the day, and was a major factor in inner-circle decisions affecting finance, business, and real estate. In that he found the satisfactions that his younger brother found in horses and yachts.

Both the Astors were members of the Union Club, which John Jacob's father-in-law, Thomas S. Gibbes, had helped to found. A mansion on Fifth Avenue in the lower Twenties, discarded by some millionaire in his march up the Avenue, was the rendezvous of the overlords. All the Astors, whether of the blood or by marriage, were of course members — the Bristeds, Chanlers, Draytons, Kanes, Langdons, and Wilkses. When the

board of governors contented itself with accepting the resignations of Confederate members, instead of expelling them, angered patriots including Astor formed the Union League Club, which became the stronghold of the Republican high command. A second revolt brewed in 1871 when many of the authentic old aristocrats, dismayed at the irruption of the newly rich into the Union Club, formed the Knickerbocker Club. Alexander Hamilton, perhaps Astor's closest friend, led the rebellion of the pedigreed. The roll of the Knickerbocker included good old Dutch and Colonial names, descendants of the Cincinnati, and vestrymen of old Trinity.

How the Founder would have snorted at men idling away hours in a club or preening themselves on their Dutch-Colonial ancestry! For himself he had preferred to spend his leisure hours riding horseback up the island, contriving to relieve both Dutch and English Colonial families of their patrimonial acres. And exclusiveness he had sought not in clubs but in the possession of nimbler, more far-seeing wits than his neighbours and competitors. Such simple single-mindedness served the Founder well, but today there were a score of men as wealthy as he had been, a city of a million souls instead of a few hundred thousand.

In this generation Fulton Street, the crossroads of Broadway, was " downtown " and Union Square the fashionable shopping district. Daring merchants even speculated on Madison Square and Thirty-third Street as coming focal points. The finger of destiny, the Astors could see, was pointing toward the intersection of Forty-second and Broadway. The Eden and Cosine farms were in the path of progress. Already John Jacob had built long rows of middle-class brownstones in the Forties; within another fifteen years the district would hum with the night life of the underworld and upper-world and then suddenly burst forth with the electric illumination of the Great White Way.

Not that he did much to encourage Broadway's upward march. The Astors did not believe in pushing fortune; John Jacob was as content as William B. to watch the city envelop uptown properties and double, triple, quadruple their value

within twenty years. No more than his father did he have a sense of the dramatic, a feeling of leadership. But he was a stickler for method (he would reword a telegram to save a dime) and he could see that his patient stewardship was increasing his dominant portion of the Astor Estate much faster than his brother's lackadaisical dalliance.

Left on his own in Wall Street with forty million dollars, Astor would have come off second best with the speculators who prowled there. Cornelius Vanderbilt took the measure of the Astor-Cunard crowd in the tussle between the upstate New York Central and the Commodore's New York & Harlem over the key bridgehead in Albany. In as abject a surrender as Wall Street ever recorded, the leading stockholders of the Albany-to-Buffalo New York Central in 1867 besought Vanderbilt to do his will.

"The undersigned . . . are satisfied that a change of administration of the company and a thorough reformation in the management of its affairs would result in larger dividends to the stockholders and greatly promote the interests of the public. They, therefore, request that you will receive their proxies for the coming election and select such a board of directors as shall seem to you to be entitled to their confidence.

"They hope that such an organization will be effected as shall secure to the company the aid of your great and acknowledged abilities."

The defeat rankled. Had not Astor's New York Central been as liberal — or nearly as liberal — with the Legislature as Vanderbilt? Had not Astor and Cunard built up the New York Central out of a dozen little railroads and railroads-on-paper between Albany and Buffalo, profited immensely on contracts, and boosted capitalization to a scandalous height? Could an upstart ferryboat man do better? He could. He not only pocketed the New York Central but tied his new New York to Buffalo road in with the Lake Shore and Michigan Central to provide a through route to Chicago. Where Astor and his associates had been satisfied with profits in the millions, Vanderbilt would take them in the hundreds of millions. It was humiliating for the grandson of the great John Jacob.

In revenge Mesdames Astor in their proud mansions on Fifth Avenue refused social recognition to Mrs. Vanderbilt. But the Vanderbilts were to have their answer to that, too; a million-dollar palace that made the Astors' homes look like coachhouses would balance the scales and eventually bring *the* Mrs. Astor to a surrender as mortifying as the New York Central's.

Revenge more substantial seemed to be offered by Astor association in the West Shore railroad along the Hudson, pushed by the Pennsylvania to wring Vanderbilt's withers. With a group of Civil War generals in charge, $75,000,000 in bonds was floated against estimated construction costs of $29,000,000. Once again Vanderbilt triumphed; the competing line was harassed, bankrupted, and attached to the Vanderbilt system under foreclosure in 1885.

Astor also figured in the Erie Railroad scandals when Jay Gould introduced him and other financial notables such as August Belmont and Levi P. Morton to the board of directors of the plundered road in order to give it an aura of much-needed respectability.

By accident a young speculator, E. H. Harriman, stumbled against Astor in 1874. Both were buying Delaware & Hudson, one for a killing, the other for investment. Unfortunately for the youngster, Astor's pocketbook was deeper, and Harriman emerged from the fray licking his wounds.

Astor had neither the stomach nor the wit to match himself against those daring adventurers who were wringing fortunes from watered stock and financial legerdemain. He confined himself strictly to gilt-edge securities — Delaware & Hudson, Columbus & Hocking, Valley Coal, New York Life & Trust, U. S. Trust, sound bank stocks and New York City sinking-fund bonds. The landlord was a money lord as well, but his policy was more suitable for a widow or orphan than a genius of finance. He saw no need of running risks to win more millions, for already he was the richest man in America. Playing in Wall Street could not add a single cubit to that lofty eminence, but might easily reduce it.

Disdainfully he watched the saturnalia of corruption in his native city, in Albany, in Washington, but never found it incum-

bent upon him to cry out. The scandals of the Grant Administration were deplorable, but the Administration was impeccable on the underlying issues of the day — the income tax, sound money, and the tariff.

New York politics, as ever, fascinated both the clever and the righteous. Mayor Fernando Wood's understudy, a slum product named William M. Tweed, improved on his dashing mentor in the post-war years. Boss Tweed was typical of his day, for upstate New York was as corrupt as the metropolis, legislators' palms in prairie Kansas twitched for bribes as eagerly as sacrosanct judges' in the effete East. Boss Tweed was pre-eminent because his cunning, audacity, and ambition overtopped all others'. By 1869 he controlled not only the city's common council, but the county's supervisors, the state's legislators, Governor Hoffman, and the key judges, too. He was literally unassailable, for he commanded every point from which attack could be made. Boisterous, merry Tweed, the "bold burglar" who was building himself a mansion on Fifth Avenue more splendid than the Astors', was only a county supervisor. But he had installed Peter Barr Sweeny, the "brains," as city chamberlain to scheme new ways of pillaging; Richard "Slippery Dick" Connolly, the sneak-thief, as controller in charge of the city's mysterious financial affairs; and A. Oakey Hall, the debonair clubman, virtuous rascal, and "dashing bandit," as mayor. Within thirty months the Ring stole $30,000,000, added $50,000,000 to the city's debt, multiplied bills against the city five, ten, and a hundred times. Chairs cost $470 apiece for a $250,000 courthouse that remained uncompleted after $8,000,000 had been spent on it.

Reformers fumed and fretted, but to no avail. To the populace Boss Tweed, at the worst, was a Robin Hood despoiling the city, but generous with praise and pennies for the poor. That Tammany stole was no news; just how it stole was a secret locked up in Dick Connolly's well-guarded books. Editor Henry J. Raymond of the *New York Times* slung verbal pebbles at Goliath. He demanded that Slippery Dick open his books for public inspection. The better elements sneered cynically at this David, or condemned him for smearing the city, or smiled com-

placently because they, too, were beneficiaries of the Ring's largesse.

As the election of 1870 drew near, the Ring became perturbed by the *Times'* incessant hammering. An astute political leader must kill the suspicion attached to Connolly's books. A scheme was propounded, as bold as any ever devised by the original John Jacob Astor in his commercial ventures. It was simply that John Jacob Astor III head a distinguished committee of bankers and big taxpayers to whitewash the Ring.

The Astor committee in due time marched into Slippery Dick's office to inspect his books. No one ever revealed what happened as the great landlord, flanked by Moses Taylor, the Civil War financier, Marshall O. Roberts, the shipping magnate, and three bankers, went over whatever books Connolly offered them. Were they all six, supposedly sharp, wary business men, innocently deceived? Or could they later plead ignorance of accountancy? Did they protest piously at being made accomplices, were they browbeaten by threats of increased taxes, or were they complacent? There is no record to tell, only the report, written probably by Astor himself, and signed by all six:

"We have come to the conclusion and certify that the financial affairs of the city under the charge of the Controller are administered in a correct and faithful manner."

The Astor certificate was given the press two days before the election. Nearly all papers played up the story, many rebuking the *Times* for its unwarranted aspersions. Certainly none could assail the integrity or impeach the competence of the Astor committee. Such men would never whitewash thieves nor be hoodwinked by crooks.

Even Raymond was taken aback, for it took him a day to word an editorial reply. He said:

"These gentlemen are large owners of property. They wish to stand well with the city. It is important, or they think it is, that their assessments should be put as low as possible. 'There is nothing so mean as one million of dollars except two millions,' someone has said. Mr. Astor and his friends are living illustrations of the truth of that saying. They have made themselves

parties to a great fraud and if we are not mistaken they will live long enough to repent it."

The electorate was not impressed with such an answer and swept Tammany to uproarious victory. The *Times* doggedly clung to its hopeless crusade. The public was urged to remember that Astor and his associates had tried to "shield the Controller from justice and to cover up the notorious and wicked frauds." Astor, although eager to do a public service for the Ring, never appeared "in connection with projects designed for the benefit of the City." Too busy to serve on the grand jury, "he had plenty of leisure for concocting a deception intended to serve a corrupt and wicked clique right on the very eve of an important election." Let honest citizens remember "to whom they are partly indebted for the continued rule of Hoffman, Tweed and Sweeny."

An indignant citizen signing himself "anti-Communist" wrote Raymond: "Already the entire middle classes who stand between the unnecessarily rich and the destructives of Tammany Hall are fleeing from high taxes and will soon leave John Jacob Astor and other enormous real estate owners face to face with a population smart enough and wicked enough to ask, 'Why should we live in the wretched slums to which we are assigned and John Jacob Astor & Company live in palaces?'"

The *Times* assailed certain rich men because "instead of combining for mutual protection against the unscrupulous officials of the Ring, [they] sneak off one after another to the Tax Commissioners' office to beg for a petty reduction of the assessment on their property. . . . This condition of things may be entirely satisfactory to John Jacob Astor and his colleagues of the Connolly whitewashing committee." Higher taxes meant little to the city's leading landlord, it was said. "Among the first to raise his rents and the last to lower them is this high-minded and public-spirited gentleman who went out of his way to keep in power the most profligate local government ever known in the history of local governments." Men like Astor had only to be "a little more brazen in their indifference to the public welfare and in their readiness to save their own possessions at whatever

cost to the country — in order to make socialism in all its varieties a very flourishing plant on American soil."

Under this barrage Astor maintained a dignified silence. But not literary Charles Astor Bristed, who explained that his distinguished cousin was falsely abused for failing to do his share in public life: The rich, said Bristed, "are prone to belong to the *parti de l'ordre*, as a Frenchman would say — in other words to acquiesce in the party in power. If that party is composed of arrant knaves, still they will try to keep on good terms with them as a Russian gentleman tries to keep on good terms with the Russian police though knowing them to be the vilest wretches. They say to themselves: 'It is true, these are terrible scoundrels. We would give a great deal to see them all hung and the balance sent to State Prison. But the public won't back us and what can we do by ourselves against the Ring with its array of foreign ruffians and native renegades and priests and what not — above all, with its appliances and opportunities for making war at the enemy's expense? *Si populus vult spoliari, spolietur*. Every man must make the best terms he can for himself.'"

But in the summer of 1871 the editor of the *Times* astounded New York and stunned Tammany Hall by publishing right across the front page the very figures themselves out of Slippery Dick's own books. Raymond's pipeline into City Hall had tapped a traitor to the Ring who supplied the actual sheets showing that on one April day of 1870 the Ring had pilfered $14,000,000. Connolly, panic-stricken, cried foolishly that his books had been rifled; Sweeny, cleverer, declared Raymond had fabricated. Most of the newspapers continued to defend the Ring or, like the *Sun*, prosecuted its campaign to raise a statue to Boss Tweed. The *Times* urged that the statue be flanked with effigies of Astor and Moses Taylor. And day by day Raymond continued his deadly exposé, driving home by entries from Connolly's own books charges that the city had been plundered of $30,000,000. The press outside New York took up the cry, and within the city itself a demand began to rise for prosecution.

Sauve qui peut, cried the Ring. It was proposed to jettison Slippery Dick and heap the entire scandal on him. Prominent

citizens organized a Cooper Union mass meeting, and to the general amazement, the names of Astor, Roberts, and Taylor appeared on the call. The meeting was postponed. Astor did not appear finally when the Committee of Seventy was named to handle prosecution of the Ring.

The peculiar lethargy which gripped the better elements was perhaps explained by the Citizens Association, the reform movement that grew out of the draft riots of 1863. In 1870 it had pushed through the Legislature the reform charter which had helped Tweed pillage the city. Under the so-called Tweed charter, boasted the Association, taxes in New York were the lowest of those in any big city. "A new state of things has been inaugurated," asserted an official statement signed, among others, by Astor himself. "The Democratic leaders are pledged to good government and the Association has full confidence that these pledges will be kept." It was discovered that the secretary of this business men's reform organization had a $10,000 job with the Ring, another job for his son, and jobs for his assistants! That killed the Citizens Association.

Marshall Roberts broke down and admitted that the certificate he had signed with Astor and others "was used as a cover and shield by those who were robbing the city" and blamed himself for "having so readily fallen into the trap."

But proud, dignified, aristocratic John Jacob Astor refused the sackcloth and ashes. He felt no repentance, nor need he. The whole spectacle of democratic government was repellent and he yearned for a system like the English: rule of the people and for the people by the aristocrats of land and money. His contempt for American ways he handed down to his son, William Waldorf, a young man of twenty-four who was following with observant eye the sordid alliance of upstate Republicans under Boss Weed and city Democrats under Boss Tweed and forming judgments which he was bold enough, thirty years later, to put to the test by renouncing his American citizenship.

Had the head of the House of Astor been able to tear himself away from his estate, it is likely that he would have accepted, several years later, President Hayes's offer of the ministry to the court of St. James's. The honour was tendered him for services

in the campaign in which the Democrat Tilden missed the Presidency by one electoral vote. The burning issue of the election was resumption of specie payment, so vital to Astor and the moneyed interests. He sponsored a Cooper Union meeting for Hayes; he served as vice president with J. P. Morgan and Theodore Roosevelt at a Republican Reform Club rally in Wall Street and subscribed his name to advertisements in praise of sound money and Republicanism. The national debt had been reduced, federal expenditures sliced, four-and-a-half-per-cent bonds sold above par, and all was well with the world. But Tilden nevertheless won the popular majority. Republicanism and sound money were saved only by the vagary of an electoral college. Jubilant over victory by such a narrow squeak, Astor joined other bondholders in 1877 in a gala dinner to Junius S. Morgan, to honour sterling services in upholding American dignity and credit in Lombard Street during crucial post-war years. Two years later specie payments were resumed and the nation's creditors rejoiced in the happy ending to the Civil War's financial problem.

In 1881 Astor, stiff and starched in his formal attire, the perfect picture of aristocrat, what with his six-foot stature, ample girth, flowing side whiskers, and imperious mien, accompanied former President Grant and other notables to the banquet table in honour of Senator Dorsey, stellar figure in the Star Route mail frauds and secretary of the Republican National Committee. It was about this time that Grant urged upon President Arthur the appointment of his friend Astor as Secretary of the Treasury. Putting America's richest man in charge of national financial policy seemed to the Republican high command to be waving a red flag in the face of embittered Grangers in the West. It was left to another Republican President, forty years later, to head his treasury with that latter-day Crœsus, Andrew W. Mellon.

If James G. Blaine's advisers had shown Arthur's wariness, the Plumed Knight of Maine might have gone to the White House in 1884. His downfall occurred in the wind-up of his campaign in New York, when he accepted a Delmonico dinner tendered by the cream of Manhattan's millionaires. At Blaine's right sat John Jacob Astor, at his left Levi P. Morton, and near

him those eminents of Wall Street, Jay Gould and Russell Sage, together with Cyrus W. Field, H. M. Flagler, the oil magnate, Darius O. Mills, the California gold baron, Andrew Carnegie, the Pittsburgh ironmaster, all feasting on canvasback duck and terrapin.

Blaine arose to speak to the pink of Republicanism. In twenty years of the Grand Old Party, he reminded them, the Empire State had waxed in wealth from $1,800,000,000 to $6,300,000,000. The party was not " arrogant " in claiming credit for organizing and maintaining the industrial system " which has enabled you to make this marvellous progress." If Grover Cleveland and the Democrats should win, " then you will have to recast your accounts and review your ledgers and prepare for a new and, I may say, a dangerous departure."

The Democracy exploded. " Feast of Finance," cried the *World,* " a dinner of dollars. . . . $1,000,000 of soap, sugar or ginger is to be raised to buy the election." It was a time of poverty and suffering in the big city. The *World* ran a five-column cartoon on the front page flaunting the contrast between " the royal feast of Belshazzar," the money kings ablaze with diamonds, and the gaunt faces of the poor begging for crumbs.

Blaine lost New York by 1,149 votes, and the Presidency with it. Former Governor Cornell, aghast, blamed the Delmonico dinner for it; Treasurer Elkins retorted that the party needed the money.

The defeat was not catastrophic. Grover Cleveland, too, was a safe, sound man. He had been introduced to Astor, Hamilton Fish, J. P. Morgan, W. M. Evarts, Leland Stanford, and other magnificoes by Governor Cornell in 1883 as he was about to yield his Executive Mansion at Albany to the Buffalo man. Cleveland was not right on the tariff, but — of more interest to the non-manufacturing New York élite to whom the tariff had never been such a gnawing issue — he stood firm for sound money. Other sins could be forgiven such a Democrat.

John Jacob Astor was satisfied. A political formula had been achieved by the rulers which permitted prosperity to dump its cornucopia into the lap of Dives no matter who sat in the White House. The system left much to be desired when compared

with the English, but men of wealth were nevertheless safe. Each year was adding millions to his hoard, all of which would be handed over intact to his only son and heir, William Waldorf, a young man of genuine distinction.

In this best of all possible worlds, this mid-Victorian interval of eternal values, bounding progress, increasing wealth, social stability, the possibilities of the Astor Estate seemed limitless. The $40,000,000 property left by William B. Astor had been split in two; even so John Jacob's share within five years from 1875 had doubled in value, in another five years it would double again. Had gold ever before poured so effortlessly into a man's lap?

CHAPTER *ii*

The Golden Canvass

In William Waldorf, future head of the House of Astor, were visibly mixed the strains of illustrious forebears. His father's cold, formal orthodoxy, his grandfather's glum introversion, the Founder's wide-eyed ambition, mingled in this scion with his mother's lively sensitiveness and imagination, his grandmother's strain of Armstrong contentiousness, and that shyness and reserve, so marked a trait in all the Astors, which may have come from the wife of the Founder.

Clearly, here was the first in three generations who showed promise of doing more than sit guard over the Founder's fertile, brooding acres of Manhattan realty. Both William B. and John Jacob III must have watched his development with apprehension. Ambition and imagination were poor qualities for a custodian of the Astor Estate.

In the traditional Astorian manner he had been sent over to Germany to finish his education and thence to Italy. There he drank in belles-lettres, ruins, Dante, antique values, carved a little, and wrote for his own amusement — bits from the lives of his favourite Borgias, whose unrestrained power and impulses fascinated him.

Back in New York, he studied law at Columbia, was graduated in 1875, specialized in real-estate law with the estate's firm. Six feet two, skilled from his days in Germany in shooting, fencing, boxing, he joined the Beef Steak Club of young fashionables and organized the Bull Pups, a sparring society which shocked their elders by inviting young ladies to witness matches.

Days he served apprenticeship in the humdrum business which had occupied his forebears, and found it wearisome. What *could* a young man do in America? He felt uneasy, unhappy. In England there were well-trodden paths for young aristocrats, but for him, alas, there was only the Astor Estate office, and he was too spirited to accept that harness docilely. He talked it over with his cousin, Charles A. Peabody, Jr., who had started as low on the political ladder as a young man of breeding could decently descend: in the lower house of the Legislature. You joined the Union League Club, oiled the machinery of your district, salted the campaign fund, and lo! you were ensconced in Albany.

William Waldorf, twenty-nine, followed the rules and was chosen, unanimously and with a hearty cheer, by the district nominating committee for a seat in the State Assembly.

Nomination was as good as election in the silk-stocking Fifth Avenue district, and the balloting of 1877 was notable only because that novelty, the telephone, was first used to transmit returns: "A reporter who had never before seen the instrument was enabled without practice, almost without instruction, to transmit figures with perfect accuracy."

The young Assemblyman was honoured with the chairmanship of the militia committee and assignments on the important committees on affairs of cities and expenditures. After all, Republican legislators from the metropolis were rare enough, and an Astor in politics a *rara avis* indeed. He voted with his party at all times: for a memorial to Congress against the free coinage of silver (a financial heresy of the first water), against investigating Republican intrigues in the coal combine (his father was a big coal and iron stockholder), for a bill to reduce official salaries, and for the use of convict labour on the Dannemora railroad. The *Herald* praised his speech against bluenose liquor legislation for New York City as "evidence that in the highest ranks of the city's wealth and culture are to be found young men who are willing to accept the labor and responsibility of public office."

Such praise was soothing, for young Astor was sensitive and ambitious. He had no great love for the obscurity of the As-

sembly, and intended to climb to the State Senate and from there to Congress. Who could tell what career awaited him at the end of the political rainbow? He found, however, that the Assembly offered him scope for "earnest effort" and a life "both agreeable and exciting." Politics, he felt, needed not so much men of ability as men of reputation and integrity of character.

In the spring of 1878 young Astor was leaving Albany early on Friday afternoons to court beautiful Mary Dahlgren Paul in Philadelphia. At Newport, that common denominator of seaboard society, Mary, known to her friends as Mamie, and William Waldorf, known to his friends as Willie, fell in love, much to the taste of Mrs. John Jacob III, who felt that New York alliances involved too many equations. The Pauls were not extremely wealthy, but well connected. Her grandfather was the celebrated Admiral Dahlgren, commander of the South Atlantic blockading squadron during the Civil War and inventor of a naval gun. Her brother had just married a daughter of Anthony J. Drexel, the banker. Mamie had dark lustrous eyes, luxuriant raven hair that fell to her feet, a pleasing manner.

A trainload of Manhattan fashionables journeyed to Philadelphia for the wedding. Mrs. John Jacob sent a cheque for $1,500 to the Children's Aid Society to transport a hundred street arabs to farm work in the West. Assembled at the Erie Station, they gave three cheers for Mrs. Astor, the bride, and the groom and were off for St. Louis. His father gave Willie a fine house at 4 East Thirty-third Street, across Fifth Avenue from the parental home, and a country house at Hempstead, Long Island.

The bridegroom declined renomination to the Assembly, but accepted promotion in 1879 to the State Senate. He pledged allegiance to the principles of Republicanism — "the maintenance of law and order, equal rights for all, and honest money." The *World* said uncharitably that "the friends of Mr. [Chester A.] Arthur say he nominated Mr. Astor not because he made a good legislator but because they needed a liberal subscription." The senatorial district, larger than his previous district, nevertheless was safe enough, and young Astor joined that most select club, the State Senate of thirty-two members.

Senator Astor startled Albany by introducing a five-cent-fare bill for the New York elevated. Mean-minded opponents declared he was seeking early development of the new Astor properties in the Annexed District (the Bronx). Others professed to see old Astor scores paid off against the interests of Jay Gould, Russell Sage, and August Belmont, which were finding in the el's ten-cent fare a road to $4,000,000 a year profits on top of scandalous stock waterings. The el lobbyists pleaded the sanctity of its franchise, lauded the el trestles as the "most magnificent structures on earth . . . an iron bridge 33 miles long." A five-cent fare would so increase traffic that the road would have to carry "18,000 tons of animal matter daily," they said; that would make the rails red-hot and shake the structure to pieces in two years.

The Red menace entered the dispute. "Is it to be desired in these days of communism," asked the el counsel, "that the Legislature should encourage the bad spirit of spoliation by breaking a contract that it most solemnly made with the Elevated roads in regard to these fares?" Some saw in the five-cent-fare bill an effort of the thrifty Astors to save a nickel. A Washington Heights meeting praised the el. "See," cried one speaker, "how luxuriously they are furnished, how well lighted, warm and comfortable. . . . As I look down at night from the Heights where I live and see the Elevated cars arrive and go, literally flying through the air, I have said, 'Really the prophesy has been fulfilled; we are riding through the air in chariots of fire!'"

The Astor bill was pigeonholed. After weeks of entreaty by its author, it was dusted off and presented to the Senate. He described the plight of property-owners who had been damaged by the opulent el, assailed ten-per-cent dividends on watered stock, and demanded that the public share in the financial bonanza through lower fares. He foresaw the city enfolded "in a hundred arms of iron" to the detriment of beauty, the distress of residents, and the ruin of honest merchants. The Senate listened, and voted down his bill, 22 to 8.

But when Assemblyman Hepburn, indignant at the arbitrary rebates and rate charges of the railroads, introduced a bill to

regulate railroad fares, Senator Astor reversed his position. After all, his family were heavy holders of Pennsylvania, Delaware & Hudson, and other rail stocks, and he wanted no government interference. Hepburn had to wait until he became a Congressman twenty-six years later to give scope to his ideas on railroad regulation.

Astor's other pet measure, to remove the unsightly Croton Reservoir at Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street, passed the Senate and received a majority but not the required sixty-five votes in the Assembly. A spite fight broke out between Senator Astor and Assemblyman Mitchell, who represented the same district. Astor's revenge was typical of the man, who carried to the full the contentious spirit of his ancestor, General John Armstrong, the hero of the Newburgh Addresses and the Pennamite-Yankee War in the Wyoming Valley. In the final hours of the session, unanimous consent was needed for the passage on third reading of Assembly bills. As the bills came up, Senator Astor glanced at a list he held of Assemblymen who had voted against his reservoir bill. Measures bearing their names he killed by simply refusing unanimous consent. As the slaughter proceeded, Assemblymen moved over into the Senate chamber to watch vindictiveness win its revenge.

Senator Astor felt now that his ability needed a wider stage. He confided his Congressional ambition to Senators Platt and Conkling, the bosses of New York State. They discovered the Seventh Congressional District awaiting a rich young man willing to pay to realize his ambitions. To be sure, the Seventh District was no silk-stocking area, bounded as it was by Fourteenth and Houston Streets, the Bowery and Avenue B, but it included a good slice of Astor realty. The Republican had barely squeezed through two years before, thanks to the split between Tammany and Irving Halls, but if Astor was willing to spend money . . . He was duly nominated on October 1, 1880, at the district convention meeting at 28 Avenue A, only a few steps from the Astor tenements.

" Your unexpected tender to me," confided Senator Astor, " is doubtless dictated by a knowledge of my convictions, and in part perhaps from the not inconsiderable property interests I

have in the district. . . . You are too sensible to care much for pledges or promises made by a candidate; my education and the fact that I am of German descent has made me, I think, better acquainted with the character and aims of that nationality which forms so large a portion of the population of the Seventh District than ordinarily falls the lot of a native-born citizen. . . . I shall do my best to support and enforce the rights of all and especially to secure to the laboring man adequate compensation for his labor."

The *Times,* which had lashed his father so bitterly only a few years before in the Tweed exposé, extended its best wishes. The *World* was sure that Philip Dugro, the Democrat, would triumph over "any influences which his Republican antagonist . . . can bring to bear on the contest."

Money, it was evident, was at the root of whatever success Astor might hope for in a working-class, normally Democratic district. The "boys" were mobilized — a thousand of them — each outfitted with a torch and marshalled into "workingmen's campaign clubs" to hear their favourite in Germania Hall. Senator Astor spoke a few words in German and then swung into his appeal for prosperity at home, honour abroad, equal rights for all. The resumption of specie payment guaranteed prosperity; the tariff assured the workingman of an American wage. Those who called for free trade, the closing of American factories, and starvation for American workingmen were not worthy to be called American citizens. The public schools, he warned, must be guarded against Papist plots (the Germans were mostly Lutheran). The Irish Catholic menace was personified by W. R. Grace. "I think," said Astor, "the nomination of Mr. Grace for mayor will influence many German voters who object to a supremacy over them of the anti-German elements of Tammany Hall." The stirring of racial and religious animosity, alluded to so delicately by the candidate, was bass-drummed by his lieutenants. And well it might be in a district where Astor felt it the better part of discretion to make no personal canvass. He had never met the tenants of his Avenue A slums face to face before, and he felt no urge to do so now. He felt "tolerably confident," however, of carrying the election

by a thousand. The *Tribune* praised him for his "active interest in the laboring classes." To Dugro's taunts he replied with dignity: "I am very happy to be called a carpetbagger by my opponent. When I first went to the Assembly three years ago I remarked that I did not go in the interest of any class but for the city's good. This is my position now. I have as great an interest in the Seventh Congressional District as I have in the part of the city in which I live."

On election night General Arthur, the Vice-Presidential candidate, General Grant, General McDowell, Governor Cornell, John Jacob Astor III, and other notables gathered at the Fifth Avenue Hotel for the returns, which were to show Garfield elected by a majority of 7,000 out of 9,000,000 votes. Great crowds surged through the city and massed around the offices of the *Tribune* to view that astounding novelty, the use of two big electric lights. "The clear white radiance of electric lights made the gas lamp in Printing House Square and below the post office seem dim and yellow. . . . The white, strained faces upturned to the electric light looked perfectly ghastly."

Senator Astor's face, too, was white and strained as he read the returns from the Seventh District showing him defeated by 165 votes out of 23,000, a defeat narrow enough to be called a moral victory in a normally Tammany district.

"What do you think of the general result of the election?" the *Tribune* asked Senator Astor.

"I regard the election of the Republican national ticket as the most substantial benefit to business interests that the country could have received."

"What do you think was the prime factor in the election of General Garfield?"

"Well, the expression of the views of business men as to the benefits likely to result from the choice of Garfield and Arthur have been most emphatic and pronounced and I think it has great weight with the community at large."

"What will be the effect of the election on the Democrats at large?"

"The Democracy have so often come up smiling after crushing defeat that it is difficult to say just how complete its de-

moralization will prove. The effect of Garfield's election upon business prospects can not be overestimated. For the next four years the business of the country is sure to flourish and to improve in every respect. Business prosperity and fear of the Solid South were, in my opinion, the two things which caused our glorious national victory."

This early Coolidge was back in the State Senate in 1881 with a bill for the incorporation of the Mexican Southern Railway by General Grant, former Governor Morton, Jesse Seligman, Collis P. Huntington, Porfirio Diaz, and many Mexican generals and politicians. The bill released an avalanche of Democratic suspicion about a "Crédit Mobilier, Jr.," but after many an unkind shaft against the incorporators the bill was passed.

A bill disapproving Jay Gould's monopoly in Western Union was attacked by Astor and downed. He introduced a measure legalizing the holding and sale of land by aliens — many of his cousins by this time were foreigners. His bill to remove the Croton Reservoir at Forty-second Street was finally adopted, but a pet measure for the labelling and packaging of poisonous drugs was rejected. He opposed in vain a bill taxing stock brokers one fifth of a mill on every dollar of stock sold. The railroad lobby succeeded in defeating his bill for the use of locomotives on the tow path to haul Erie Canal barges. Costs would be cut in half and traffic speeded, he claimed, but the lobby was quick to see an Astorian effort at revenge against the New York Central.

The legislative session was about to end and Astor to slip quietly back to private life when Empire State Republicanism was thrown into an uproar by the bitter struggle between Platt and Conkling, the New York Senators, and President Garfield over control of New York port patronage and the allied problem of civil service. It was another flare-up in the eternal war between senatorial privilege and presidential prerogative. By resigning, the Senators had dramatized the issue for the front pages; hastening from Washington to Albany, they demanded that the Legislature re-elect them in order to reprove the President.

Stalwarts, headed by State Senator Astor, lined up behind the

federal Senators; "Halfbreeds" (many of whom were later to be known as "mugwumps") supported the President. The quarrel stemmed back to Stalwart support of a third term for General Grant; the Republican convention had deadlocked over Grant and Blaine and then accepted Garfield as a dark horse. The Stalwarts comforted themselves with the nomination of Chester A. Arthur as Vice President. Safely in the White House, Garfield snubbed the Stalwarts by refusing to name either Conkling or the financier Levi P. Morton as Secretary of the Treasury. The storm broke when Garfield took the all-important New York port patronage away from the Stalwarts.

Senator Astor served as whip in the drive for the re-election of the two Senators in what the press painted as a conflict between sinister, selfish New York bossism and enlightened Presidential espousal of civil-service reform. The first ballot revealed the Republican split: eight votes for Platt to seven for Chauncey M. Depew, the New York Central lobbyist; and nine for Conkling to six for his "Halfbreed" opponent. Platt dropped the bitter contest when Charles J. Guiteau, a disappointed office-seeker, dramatized the civil-service issue with his pistol, shooting President Garfield to the cry: "I am a Stalwart and now Arthur is President." Conkling hung on stubbornly, to the dismay of the *Tribune* which termed the Conklingites "feather-heads" and "assistant Democrats."

The balloting continued in the Legislature far into the summer of 1881 until the Conkling forces gave in. Two important results followed. Thanks to the Stalwart-Halfbreed schism, Grover Cleveland was elected Governor in 1882 and President in 1884. And Senator Astor ruled himself out of politics, for the days of the Platts and Conklings were over. He had backed the wrong horse, but he was not to know that for several months. To him it seemed essential to remain in their graces because he was still consumed by a desire to go to Congress. Not very shrewd politically, he believed that with the bosses' benediction he would succeed. He could not foresee that the assassin's bullet would end their power, and that reform, for the time, would be more of an asset than party regularity.

A disciple of his father's party orthodoxy, he could be par-

doned for his rigid fidelity to the bosses. Their man Arthur was now President. And Conkling and Platt still ruled New York State Republicanism, or at any rate its Stalwart section. So when Levi P. Morton, whose banking house had managed the funding of the public debt, was lifted from Congress to become Minister to France, the party bosses smiled favourably upon Astor's application for the vacant seat. Nomination was tantamount to election, for the Fifteenth Congressional District was practically the same Fifth Avenue silk-stocking area which Astor represented in the Senate. Although all the rest of New York might go Democratic, that district could usually be depended upon to remain the faithful rock of Republicanism.

Elihu Root nominated the young politician in a speech combining wit and gravity. "We have all the elements of strength: Stalwarts, halfbreeds, halfbreed stalwarts, and stalwart halfbreeds." "And thoroughbreds," shouted a delegate. "We expect to score one more victory in the coming election and so we virtually name tonight who shall be our next delegate to Congress."

Root was too optimistic. Halfbreeds were not yet reconciled to Astor's last-ditch leadership of the Stalwarts in the Senate. His "slavish adherence to the machine was inexcusable on the part of a man in politics not for the money in it but for an ambition to serve the public," said the *Post*. He was just a tool of Tammany, the *Herald* complained. The *Times* was dubious.

A gleam of hope entered Democratic eyes. A certain Orlando B. Potter had been nominated for the dreary task of contesting the silk-stocking district. He was hastily withdrawn in favour of Roswell P. Flower, a Wall Street broker, who could stand toe to toe, dollar to dollar, with Astor in what was to be known as "the Golden Canvass."

That convinced the hesitating *Times* that Astor was the lesser of two evils despite his "disregard of the wishes of his constituents during the Senatorial struggle at Albany." The *Sun* discovered that the financial exactions imposed upon both candidates were "preposterous." Astor was declared ready to "engage in unbounded and corrupt expenditures. . . . Apart from his money Mr. Astor is one of the weakest aspirants who ever

sought the suffrages of a New York constituency. He has been tried in the Legislature and has proved himself the most partisan, the most narrow-minded, the most selfish of representatives."

Astor was stung to the quick by the sudden, unexpected avalanche of criticism heaped on his head. In previous campaigns he had been praised for public-mindedness in leaving the luxury of a private life to enter politics. Now, aside from the friendly *Tribune* and the half-hearted *Times*, he was deluged with criticisms of his wealth, of his Stalwartism, of his legislative record on the Harlem ship canal and street-cleaning reform. He answered that his record was being twisted and that the charges against him were "utterly unfounded."

But how was he to reply to the *Telegram's* editorial about lavish campaign expenses? Said the *Telegram:* "The Republic has fallen upon evil times when it comes to be generally believed that no classes but unscrupulous rogues or hardly less scrupulous millionaires dare aspire to office at the hands of their fellow-countrymen."

Jacob Riis, a young reporter, contrasted the campaign of Senator Astor with that of his hero, Theodore Roosevelt, just out of college, candidate for the Assembly, the one "representative of vast inherited wealth," the other of "bluest of old Knickerbocker blood." Astor was "pouring out money like water, contemptuously confident that so he could buy his way in"; Roosevelt was refusing to canvass the saloons and stressing clean streets and clean politics.

The final week of campaigning was the test of a candidate's stamina. Astor, thirty-three, clad in a brown fall overcoat, dark trousers, new derby, lustrous shoes, his hands gloved, climbed a little grimly into his shining coupé at Thirty-third Street to drive to his uptown headquarters behind a pair of big bay horses. With him was Colonel Marshall, his personal aide and a revenue inspector, deeply respected in tobacco and liquor shops. It was their custom to drop into the saloons, Astor ordering a bottle of champagne, although he barely touched a glass to his lips, passing a few words in German, and bustling out to the next bar. From bar to tobacconist to brewery to bar,

indefatigably, humourlessly, with a touch of impatience and concealed disgust, he went through the motions of aspiring candidate, buying drinks and passing out cigars. Up in Harlem at night, he went into a saloon dance-hall. A golden eagle was dropped on the bar, drinks ordered all around. One fellow complained that Astor was "too high-toned" for such folks. "I'll show you how high-toned I am," he replied. "Where is your lady?" And the richest heir in America danced with the girl in the barroom.

The *Tribune* defended its candidate for standing by "the party of patriotism, of honest money and economical government and the rights of labor," and for taking upon himself "the duties and responsibilities of a legislator instead of living a life of luxurious ease and elegant indolence." As for vote-buying, Roswell Flower was not a poor man, either, and it was notorious that Democratic money was flowing like whisky in the Fifteenth Congressional District.

It was a fight to the finish with no hold barred. "We have," said Flower, "no landlord aristocracy here, thank God! to whom the poor man must doff his hat and smile the smile of obsequious deference." The *Sun* reported Astor was using two-cent stamps on his forty thousand letters to voters to avoid having his mail dumped in the sewers, and that twenty hired men were watching the letter-carriers. A Greenback-Labor candidate had been financed to draw radical votes away from the Democrat, the *Sun* added.

The *Tribune* noted the unusual number of "strikers" asking Astor for money to vote for him; the *Sun* asserted that double eagles (twenty-dollar gold pieces) were the symbol of the campaign. Astor was criticized for shaking hands with his gloves on and for barely touching the beer and wine glass. His predecessor, Levi P. Morton, it was said, would have taken off his coat and helped the barkeep. "Mr. Flower," observed the *Times*, "wants to go to Congress and he does not mean to be beaten if money can prevent it." "After keeping a racing stable and running a stud farm," the *Telegram* wrote, "running for Congress in this city is about the most expensive amusement going."

On the eve of election the *Tribune* waved the bloody shirt. It was the same old issue between the party of progress " and the party that did its best to break up the Government, has made repeated attempts to impair or destroy the national credit and has no fixed principles of any sort, no national policy; neither honesty among its leaders nor intelligence among its masses."

The morning of election day General Grant, smoking a seegar, strolled through Astor's district with Conkling to lend moral support. That evening Astor and his managers gathered at headquarters. The candidate sat alone, pad in hand, checking returns and occasionally stroking his short-cropped moustache nervously. On his little finger was noted a ring with large diamonds sparkling in the gas light. He became more sullen as the returns indicated that he had lost his rock-ribbed silk-stocking district. At nine o'clock he picked up his hat and left for home.

Bitter thoughts must have raced through his mind — disgust for the craven politicians who had double-crossed him, for the sodden voters whose hands had been so eagerly outstretched, contempt for democratic processes which subjected a man of wealth to a mud-bath. The newspapers had lied about his legislative career; his millionaire opponent, a contemptible demagogue, had posed as a man of the people. Birth and blood and breeding, instead of being assets, had been turned by a degenerate, mongrel democracy into liabilities.

The *Tribune* sympathized: " It is always dangerous for men of great wealth to expose themselves to the suffrage. The passion of envy is the most deeply planted and the most insidious in the human heart."

Declaring his defeat a " public boon," the hostile *World* declared that " Mr. Astor's political career has consisted of a demonstration that a man of wealth and education can be as unscrupulous a machinist and demagogue as the poorest and most ignorant voter.

" The golden China Astor is withered and dead, and a purer, brighter Flower takes its place," quipped the *Herald*. An anonymous Republican was quoted by the *Herald* as visiting Flower to relate this story:

"Not long since I dined with the Republican candidate. There were three other gentlemen in the party, all of us Republicans. In the course of the conversation the host spoke with the utmost confidence of his election. 'Why,' he said, 'I could be elected from any district in this city for $30,000.' He spoke so flippantly and contemptuously of the honest voters of the city and asserted his power to purchase his seat in Congress so audaciously that I was disgusted and so were my friends."

The *Times* held that he had lost "in spite of a personal canvass more suggestive of the electioneering methods of an old-fashioned English borough than of a populous congressional district in an American city. The moral is that the possessor of an honored name, of great wealth, of sound ability and of an unexceptionable private character, may throw all these advantages away when at a critical moment in his political career he forgets what is due his constituents as well as to his own independence and self-respect."

Jacob Hess, Astor's manager, ridiculed the opposition press. "This hue and cry about his extravagance in the campaign is all moonshine." Astor had not spent more than fifteen thousand dollars. Barney Biglin, another lieutenant, also denied he had handled money. "Oh, I suppose Mr. Astor like any other candidate," he explained, "would not be stingy in paying all reasonable expenses in the canvass. Any man who is not prepared to do that is too mean to vote for."

To Astor the talk about vote-buying was sheer hypocrisy. Just who was Roswell P. Flower, if not a corruptionist himself, who had undoubtedly bought his way to victory? In future years he was to earn the reputation of being a "flamboyant millionaire" who "had a barrel and would take out the bung," a so-called champion of the people who in 1896 as spokesman for the anti-Bryan Democrats and temporary chairman of the Democratic National Convention declared that "this gathering is notice to the world that the Democratic party has not yet surrendered to Populism and Anarchy."

The defeat of the 1881 campaign dried up young Astor's desire for public service. His father was right: democracy was a

disgraceful farce with which men of breeding and culture should have nothing to do. Henry Adams had written Henry Cabot Lodge that politics was a mean game in which good men were beaten or corrupted, for instance "Willy Astor." Willy agreed.

Young as he was, he displayed in full bloom the aristocrat's contempt for the public. He believed cynically that the public could be corrupted into electing "good men" — a good man being one who, to the contrary, could not be corrupted but would use his best judgment on affairs of state. That the electorate itself could have ideas worth listening to was unlikely: government of the people and for the people would be administered by gentlemen in frock coats, learned in Latin and the eternal laws of political economy. That such gentlemen might harbour selfish emotions was unthinkable; the condition of affairs which enabled men of wealth to prosper was indubitably the best for all. It was fitting and proper that the Astors pass laws which coincided with their own interests, which were the public's interests.

If such arguments hardly flattered the electorate, young Astor cared little. The Astors, since the death of the Founder, had lost the common touch. Men in the mass they knew only as tenants, and the landlords were not impressed. Property and its possession was the fundamental verity, the way to salvation was through acquisition. If millions lost out in this struggle, they were not fit to survive. It was a cold philosophy standing square across young Astor's political career. There were many safe Republican districts in the United States where such ideas were no bar to advancement, but none such was to be found in New York City. That was Astor's misfortune.

It was not like this intense, thin-skinned young man to take defeat with a shrug of the shoulders. Surfeited with wealth, he desired political advancement to set some outward seal of worth upon a spirit that hungered for recognition. It was not enough just to be rich and a landlord. In England he would have been a noble in ermine robes, before whom the county people bared their heads. His title would be patent proof of his blood and

rank. America, unfortunately, had made no provision to satisfy this yearning. So to England young Astor began to look as hatred burned within him for his native country.

Henry J. Raymond, editor of the *Times,* who had been so unsympathetic to John Jacob III in the Tweed scandals, had diagnosed the Astorian trouble. The rich, he said, " cannot take it in politics." Deferred to in the home, in their clubs, in their board meetings, they demand deference from the public. " As things stand now, if a rich man goes into politics and a ruffian says he lies or calls him ' an old pocketbook ' or threatens to ' warm him ' at a primary meeting, he goes straight home, has a ' good cry ' with his wife, vows he will never touch politics again, thinks the country cannot last very long. . . . He wants respect and politeness in his work and must have them or he will not work. . . . But for decency's sake do not let us have any whining from them because Marcotte and Tiffany cannot be called in to upholster or decorate our political system so that the millionaires can be patriots in an agreeable way."

Fortunately, Astor did not have to brood long over the inadequacies of a democracy. President Arthur was sensible of this aspiring young Republican's sacrifice for the Stalwarts, sympathetic to his yearning for a title. He was appointed Minister to Italy, an assignment that did credit to his wealth and aristocracy. There where ancient glories shone through decadent mediævalism, Astor leased a fine old palazzo in whose halls magnificent entertainments were given to the diplomatic corps, the old Roman families, and high government officials. Mrs. Astor, belle of Philadelphia and Newport in 1877, became a favourite at court. Queen Margherita, in an outburst of enthusiasm guided by New Italy's desperate search for friends, said that she was the most beautiful woman in the land.

The cold etiquette of the diplomatic life, the stiff punctilio of protocol, the gorgeous background of Roman receptions, the austere memory of noble ages past — all these warmed Minister Astor's chilly heart and assured him of his own worth and dignity. Nevertheless, strange dissonance, it was not beneath that dignity to introduce a Tiffany salesman to King Humbert, although Henry White, secretary of the legation in Vienna, had

coldly declined such commercialization of the diplomatic service, and Alphonse Taft, Minister to France, had slammed the door in the salesman's face.

Life in Rome was easy. America had no diplomatic problems of first water with the new Kingdom and so the Minister returned to his early fascination with the Borgias. The character of Cesare Borgia, the son of Pope Alexander VI, intrigued Astor. By his cruelty, his utter want of scruple, and his good fortune, Cesare had made himself lord of the Romagna. History says that his avidity was insatiable and that he could brook no opposition. "In personality he was morose, silent and unsympathetic. Clever and unscrupulous, he nevertheless governed with firmness and justice so that his rule was preferred to the anarchy of factions and local despots."

Astor sympathized with the Prince and drew philosophic comparisons between Renaissance Italy and affairs in America. He pondered deeply the uninhibited nature of the Borgias and presented his picture of them — was it an inverted picture of himself? — in the novel *Valentino,* published in 1885. The story is told that the manuscript was accepted by Scribner's before the identity of the author, indicated by a six-pointed star drawn by Astor on the first page, was known.

Valentino was greeted as a literary novelty, the blossoming of unsuspected qualities in an Astor. The plot was lumbering, the characters creaked, the dialogue was replete with stilted, archaic sentences in the romantic-heroic fashion of the time. Nevertheless *Valentino* was acclaimed in the newspapers, and Minister-Author Astor was refreshed by the reviews. The *Times'* literary critic remarked however that *Valentino* and a later novel, *Sforza,* "deplorably failed to make him famous, doubtless because, owing to our mad addiction to baseball and controversies about the tariff, literary taste is still unformed in this country."

His thoroughly agreeable exile was interrupted in 1885 by the triumph of Grover Cleveland — an outgrowth of Republican dissension inspired in part by his own bitter fight for the Stalwarts in the New York Legislature of 1881. He returned to New York, but could find little to interest him. He was through

with politics, was not much interested in real estate, which his father handled with such commendable ability, possessed few friends. Philanthropy did not appeal to him, for he had no comprehension of the misery beneath him. Even the Astor Library did not interest him. He resigned from the only public enterprise to which the Astor name was linked, perhaps because continuing criticism of the library's straitened circumstances struck him as the base ingratitude one might expect from the public.

He was a member of the boards of the Lackawanna, the Delaware & Hudson, Illinois Central, U. S. Trust, and Farmers Loan & Trust, but took no active part in their management. He belonged to all the best clubs — Union, Union League, Knickerbocker, Century, Tuxedo, Lawyers, but spent little time in any of them except the Tuxedo.

The Tuxedo was the arch-type of country club. In 1814 Pierre Lorillard, the tobacco merchant, had foreclosed on a piece of property up in the Ramapo Mountains. Pierre Lorillard III in 1885 converted the place into a club complete with gamekeepers in green and yellow with Tyrolese hats. Astor was enthusiastic over a country refuge for gentlemen, became a member of the governing committee, and was among the first to build a cottage there.

Named to a committee to examine the Revolutionary background of the Tuxedo country, he prepared a report which he published in a little volume on fine paper, daintily bound. The name, traced variously as Tuxcito, Tuxetough, Tucksito, Tugseto, Tucsedo, Texedo, Toxedo, Duck Sider, Duck Sedar, he decided was derived from the Algonquin " p'tauk-Seet-tough " (home of the bear). Claudius Cave had been a hang-out for Revolutionary cowboys, Washington's army had tramped along a trail Astor wanted renamed Continental Road, a gorge should be renamed the Clove, Grub Creek rechristened Stein Valetje. He asked for a clearing, with rustic benches, at the point where Chastellux first saw the lake.

Such was the life of this strange young man, heir to the main stream of the Astor fortune, as he waited dutifully for the day when he would rule the House.

CHAPTER *iii*

The Astor Slums

CONTEMPORARIES differed in their estimate of the Astor Estate and of its guardian, John Jacob III. He was " the ideal landlord," said the *Herald.* " His tenants believe there was never a more just or reasonably liberal landlord. His property was well kept up."

The *Times* disagreed: " He loses no opportunity of raising his rents, never repairs a street if he can help himself and takes good care to do less for his tenants than any landlord in the city."

The *Sun* was pessimistic. On William Backhouse's death in 1875, that journal remarked that he had " done nothing all his lifetime but build houses and collect their rents. His sons and his sons' sons will do no more. . . . What they will chiefly care for will be to hold on to what they have."

That seemed to be true. Every morning John Jacob III was at his offices, solid, dignified, unostentatious. A bronze plaque labelled simply " Astor Estate " informed passers-by that here at 21–23 West Twenty-sixth Street, a stone's throw from Trinity Chapel and from Madison Square — the very center of the city — and a few blocks from the Astor mansions on Fifth Avenue, were the headquarters of a $100,000,000 enterprise with a net intake comparable only with A. T. Stewart's immense emporium, Drexel, Morgan & Company, or Morton Bliss & Company down on Wall Street, yet noiseless and frictionless. Dignified agents in derbies and round-cut jackets slipped in and out; behind the windows, with their gracefully curved bars, toiled a small crew of clerks. Here, in decorous silence, so unlike the

hurly-burly of A. T. Stewart's, or the eager tenseness of the downtown banking houses, was managed the largest estate in the New World. Here in ledgers and on plat books was recorded a business that drew tribute from every major thoroughfare in the metropolis. There were Astor houses, tenements, business structures, warehouses — every kind of building — to be found on Avenue A and First, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh Avenues.

On the numbered streets, east and west, there was Astor property on: Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, Eleventh, Little West Twelfth, Thirteenth, Fourteenth, Fifteenth, Sixteenth, Seventeenth, Eighteenth, Nineteenth, Twentieth, Twenty-fifth, Twenty-sixth, Twenty-seventh, Twenty-ninth, Thirtieth, Thirty-third, Thirty-fourth, Thirty-fifth, Thirty-sixth, Thirty-ninth, Fortieth, Forty-first, Forty-second, Forty-third, Forty-fourth, Forty-fifth, Forty-sixth, Forty-seventh, Forty-eighth, Forty-ninth, Fiftieth, Fifty-first, Fifty-second, Fifty-fourth, Fifty-fifth, Fifty-sixth, Seventy-fourth, Seventy-fifth, Seventy-sixth, Seventy-ninth, Ninetieth, Ninety-first, Ninety-second, Ninety-third, Ninety-fourth, Ninety-sixth, 107th, 117th, 125th, 129th, 130th, 150th, 185th. On the named streets and avenues: Amsterdam, Barclay, Barrow, Bleecker, Bowery, Broadway, Broome, Cooper Square, Clarkson, Crosby, Dey, Duane, Elizabeth, Front, Gansevoort, Grand, Greene, Greenwich, Harrison, Houston, Hudson, John, King, LaFayette, Lenox, Leroy, Liberty, Macomb, Madison, Mercer, Nassau, New, Park, Park Row, Pearl, Pine, Prince, St. Nicholas, South, Vesey, Wall, Washington, West, White, and Worth.

Big business blocks were a new venture of the Astor Estate: the Astor Building at Pine and Wall, the Schermerhorn at Broadway, Pine, and Wall (an immense money-maker), Exchange Court at Broadway, New and Exchange Place, the Guaranty & Indemnity and the Oriole Buildings, both in the financial district, and the Rogers Peet Building at Prince and Broadway.

In the fast-growing district north of Broadway and Forty-second Street a thousand brownstone fronts were erected for the middle-class trade. The " radish garden " on the lower East Side was now solidly built up with five- and six-story tenements.

Along Fifth Avenue and its cross streets in the old Thompson farm scores of mansions had been erected.

So from the tenements of the poor, the brownstones of the middle class, the palaces of the rich, the buildings for finance and trade, and the old Astor House poured revenues that would have flattered any half-dozen English dukes. By the 1880's probably as much as $5,000,000 a year was being taken in at the Astor Estate offices, more than half to the account of John Jacob III, a third or so to negligent William, and the rest to nourish the collateral branches.

Prudent John Jacob now looked across the narrow Harlem River, already many-bridged, upon the farms and country estates of verdant Westchester and hoped to emulate the Founder's wisdom by discreet purchases of acres that later might be sold or built upon as lots. The oldest landed family on the Harlem shore were the Morrises, seedy descendants of old Gouverneur and Lewis Morris of Morrisania. The Astor Estate began buying slabs of Morris Estate property in trans-Harlem, known at the time as the Annexed District of New York City. Sagacious as this purchase was, it could hardly be compared with the Founder's choice of farms far up Manhattan Island in the first decade of the century. Then there were many to say that the fur merchant was burying his money in rocks; in the 1870's, however, it was obvious that the Annexed District awaited only the marvels of el transportation. Astor began diking in the muddy north shore of the Harlem for industrial uses, and laying out his Jerome Park acres.

More in the spirit of the Founder was Astor's purchase of land on the Bronx River near the West Farms rural station on the New Haven Railroad. It took a powerful optimism to see apartments and tenements out there; nevertheless New York City was to embrace even those distant fields and in due time the very name of West Farms would bring a cynical smile to metropolitanites dashing for the subway.

Astor, painstaking, intelligent, conscientious, could easily manage the direction of his great estate, but he could not defend it unaided. For that purpose he called in New York's most distinguished lawyers, William Maxwell Evarts, Charles F.

Southmayd, and Joseph H. Choate, members of the city's most redoubtable partnership. Evarts and Southmayd were an admirable team, the one eloquent in forensics, the other a human ferret burrowing through ancient precedents to build up unimpeachable cases.

The Astor Estate was an ideal client. Rentals ran into the millions each year, taxes soared above a million, and in the intricacies of such a business, compounded of leases, assessments, tax levies, and tangled titles, lawyers became wealthy. Always there was Tammany to be fought off when it became too avaricious. The Astors acted on the assumption that all assessments against their property were a kind of imposition devised by thieving contractors and scheming politicians. Many a case noted as *Astor* vs. *The Mayor et al.* went through all the courts to test the city's rights to order improvements. The Founder, William B., and John Jacob III insisted that uptown real estate should lie fallow until the necessities of would-be residents and merchants equalled the Astor demands. The city on the other hand was anxious to cut through and grade streets, lay sewers, water mains, and pavements, and open new districts — often because contractors in alliance with city officials saw juicy profits in the offing. The law records were filled with Astorian objections against such improvements. There was the matter, too, of tax assessments. The Astors were by no means optimists when it came to valuing their property for tax purposes.

Charles F. Southmayd, partner of Evarts and Choate and a trustee of the Astor Estate, seemed born to defend it against poachers. His ingenious mind, which wrote the brief that overthrew the income tax, possessed, said Choate, a " sixth sense — the sense of property." He felt that a tax on income was an iniquitous attack on the very foundation of civilized government, a baldly unethical effort to rob one man for another's benefit. All his life he spent in the " dark, narrow canyon of the law " with no other interest — no wife, no family, no sport or amusement. Women he regarded as a painfully expensive luxury.

After his retirement in 1884, his declining years were filled with apprehensions. He employed counsel to watch for " man-

traps" in legislation that might affect his own fortune or make him, all unwitting, a law-breaker. From 1855 he had never changed his habits or costume — "the most conservative man I ever knew," said Choate, himself a pillar of conservatism. His pet aversion was the newfangled elevated railroad and he never used it. When the Sixth Avenue cars introduced coal stoves in winter, he changed to the Fourth Avenue line. When that line switched from horses to electricity, he reproached the management bitterly and deserted it for another. He would not ride in an elevator. After passage of the Raines law, aimed at the use of premises for prostitution, old Southmayd sold all his real estate for fear it might be used for illegal purposes and thus send him to prison. Matthew Arnold met him and marvelled, saying that he was a solicitor dug out of Dickens. When he died, his will was found written on fifty-seven pages of foolscap — although he had no family. Such were the legal servitors of the Astor Estate.

The elevated railways which Southmayd loathed so passionately, he watched professionally with a suspicious eye for their effect on property values of the Astor Estate. Whatever their boon in rapid transportation, the els blighted the broad avenues over which they roared, turning them into darkened lanes between pillars. Even more jealously did the guardians of the Astor Estate scrutinize proposals for an el or underground on Broadway, that winding road that linked the choicest of Astor properties.

Many an eerie scheme was sketched to deliver the growing, congested city from the horse-car straitjacket. Elevateds that were to run over rows of single pillars, over the roof tops of buildings, that were to be drawn by endless cables, that were to have drawbridges to permit hay wagons to pass under, an underground skimming through basements and cellars — these were some of the proposals. Subways were ruled out by the Croton water board because they would interfere with water mains. William B. Astor had been interested in Peter Cooper's experimental plan for an el in 1847. In 1866 promoters turned up with a legislative franchise for a Broadway subway, to the dismay of Astor and other landlords who feared the city's main

street might disappear into the hole. The *Herald* was sure an elevated was preferable on Broadway: "By bronzing the iron work and using ornamental brackets and iron filagree work, the whole structure would not offend the most fastidious taste."

In 1871 the Viaduct Railway scheme was authorized by the Legislature and sensitive souls gasped to read the names of the incorporators: Richard B. (Slippery Dick) Connolly, Mayor A. Oakey Hall, Peter B. Sweeny, John Jacob Astor, A. T. Stewart, August Belmont, and William M. Tweed. The Tweed Ring and the city's financial overlords associated in a scheme calling for $5,000,000 in city bonds after private citizens had subscribed $1,000,000! Editors detected an odious smell and appealed to Astor and his fellow capitalists to dissociate themselves from the Tweedsters. The exposé of the Ring obviated the need for that. A few years later William B. Astor was protesting a scheme for municipal rapid transit; he was "unqualifiedly opposed to any appropriation of public moneys to any purposes whatever not the legitimate purposes of government."

Truth was that the Astors did not look kindly upon rapid transit at the time. Their holdings were concentrated below Central Park, and congestion added to their value. The Arcade Railway planned for the beautification of underground Broadway by building arcades lined with fine shops, a shelter in winter against the elements, in summer against the heat (four lines of tracks were also included). But when it neared the shovel stage, Astor's injunction stopped any digging. Judges listened to his plea that the underground's franchise was unconstitutional, snorted at the possibility of running a railroad "without smoke, gas or cinders." That stopped New York subway-building for the remainder of the century.

Progress might come in elevated railways and electric street cars, but New York slums remained the same, if they did not actually slip backward as tenements grew older and the plague of railroad-type buildings, twenty-five feet wide and sixty to ninety feet long, encompassing two to four dark rooms to every one lighted by windows, spread up the island. With the new prosperity of 1878–9 after the long winter of the panic of 1873 tenement-building speeded up, to the horror of the few dis-

interested citizens familiar with the design for living laid down by such unventilated, unlighted monstrosities. The city's ministers set aside February 23, 1879, as Tenement House Sunday, and the pulpits rang with descriptions of the squalor of half a million slum-dwellers. The flames of indignation licked around the feet of landlords when it was disclosed that the new tenements of 1879 were more foul than those of 1859 and rivalled Dublin's and Naples'! The better class of landlords was appealed to. Astor, Hamilton Fish, J. A. Roosevelt, Royal Phelps, Rutherfurd Stuyvesant, Adrian Iselin, Jr., leaders among landlordism's mighty, were among those who signed a call to that temple of reform, Cooper Union. Mayor Peter Cooper presided, but the elder Astor was not present.

Choate, Astor's lawyer in landlord and ejectment suits, assailed political corruption as rooted in "the very worst of the tenement houses." Appeals to landlords were futile; in the "pockets of the tenement house owner there you will find his conscience." Strong words those from the lawyer for the Astor Estate. The cure, it was decided, could be found in the erection of model tenements — a cure that was to curse tenement-house reform for fifty years. Mayor Cooper named a committee of nine to examine the problem, and William Waldorf Astor was one of the nine. The landlords were to investigate themselves!

A call was issued for model tenement plans, to be judged by three men, neither architects nor sanitary engineers nor slum-dwellers. Theirs was an impossible task — to find a suitable structure into which to squeeze a hundred people on a lot twenty-five feet wide. They awarded the palms to three plans which provided that all interior rooms be forever darkened.

Architects were furious. E. D. C. Raht branded the model plans "a servile imitation of the present systems." Richard M. Hunt, the most fashionable architect of the period, declared that dark bedrooms should not be tolerated; their ventilating shafts were worse than a sham, for they sucked up the flames that gutted tenements. Associates of his firm denounced "the rapacity of landlords and their agents" as the main cause of bad housing and cited Parisian rules that tenements must not occupy more than two thirds of the land area. The *American*

Architect waxed satirical about "tenement reform." The *Tribune* assailed the prize-winning plans for failing to answer "requirements of sanitary science and practical reform."

But the competition was not fruitless. Among the plans rejected were two which eliminated windowless bedrooms by providing narrow slits or "courts" in the middle of buildings. From them was developed the "dumbbell" tenement, to become the notorious standard of "old-law" tenements. Midway in a building seventy to eighty feet deep was introduced a court generally about twelve feet long and five to six feet wide. If the neighbouring tenement was dumbbelled, then the court tapered to an extreme width of twelve feet. Bedroom windows thus looked out on what was really a shaft into which the sun could never shine except on the top floor, and that for only a few hours a day. The bottom of the shaft was soon cluttered with refuse and became so noxious that tenants on the lower floors preferred to shut their windows, installed for ventilation, rather than suffer from the noisome stenches.

The landlords' Cooper Union meeting thus resulted in a plan described by the *Tribune* as "marking no progress whatever in sanitary reform." Worse, it fastened upon the city for two decades, and in the name of reform, a type of building which failed utterly to grapple with the twin evils of foul air and sunlessness.

Meanwhile the Committee of Nine had laboured with New York's procrustean bed, the twenty-five by hundred-foot lot. Finding that no satisfactory tenement could be erected on such a plot, they recommended the use of double lots fifty feet wide which would permit interior courts, and the limitation of buildings to sixty-five per cent of the ground area. It turned out, however, that there was no way to prevent a man from building a tenement on a single lot, so the Legislature confined itself to limiting the ground area covered.

The new law roused a storm of protest from landlords and contractors. Fortunately Senator Astor, who had recommended its enactment, was still on hand in Albany. He introduced, on March 12, 1880, a bill amending the Tenement House Act to give the Board of Health discretion in applying the sixty-five-per-cent provision — the very heart of the law. As a member

of the powerful judiciary committee, he obtained its approval, and the bill was jammed through the Legislature in its closing days, without hearings and while legislators were already leaving for Chicago for the Republican National Convention.

The Astor amendment doomed tenement-house reform in New York for another two decades. But no storm of fury broke around the Astors. Ministers did not thunder denunciations nor editors pen biting criticism of the city's leading landlord family for changing the tenement law to suit themselves. The *Tribune* reported that the Board of Health had been given "some needed discretion," but few of the Albany correspondents considered the change worth even a small paragraph. And yet that was the biggest story of 1880 for New York City's 500,000 slum-dwellers.

There were columns of newspaper space, however, for the Improved Dwellings Association, which got together $260,000 from Astor and other capitalists for a model tenement at First Avenue and Seventy-first Street. Every room was ventilated and a new note in tenement luxury was added, bathrooms in the basement. But rentals ranging from nine to fifteen dollars a month for three- and four-room apartments put them out of reach of those earning less than three dollars a day.

High rents in the model tenement made it painfully apparent that there was no hope either from the Legislature or from five-per-cent capitalists for the city's poor.

Yellow fever broke out in the hot summer of 1879 and the Board of Health determined to make use of its power under the new Tenement House Act to investigate sanitary conditions. Inspectors flanked by reporters pierced into the lower depths of the 17th Ward south of Tompkins Square along First Avenue and Avenue A where the Astor tenements, and little else, flourished.

At the first Astor tenement, 58 Avenue A, were found eight families with twenty-four children. On each floor were four dark bedrooms. The hall was lighted from a skylight. Little water got to the upper floors because of low pressure. The water closet in the court was foul. On the other hand 60 Avenue A was neat and healthful — the lessee was conscientious. In the rear apartment at 138 East Fourth Street a man, three women,

and two children lived in three rooms, two of them dark bedrooms measuring eight by eight. The other room, the kitchen, was eight by twelve. In it a woman with a broken leg, who had had no medical attention for weeks, lay upon an old lounge. Two pale children attended her. The rooms, reported the *Tribune* man, were " stifling," polluted by the stench from the privies in the court.

The building in the rear of 140 East Fourth was excellent. At 144 East Fourth a flower garden's " redolent fragrance strove in vain to overcome the stench from four undrained closets." At 148 East Fourth the bedrooms were seven by eight feet, the apartment so crowded with furniture that there was only footroom. Contrary to an old law, the cellar was inhabited. The water closet in the yard was drained by the waste water from the yard faucet. " The water works charge me $2 a year to supply waste water to each closet," the lessee explained. " That is why so few of the tenements connect their closets properly."

At 152 East Fourth the health inspector and reporter found fourteen families with forty-one children and thirty-one adults. The hall, filled with women and children, had a skylight which " illuminated a scene of misery and dirt below. A pump in the hall was able to force a few drops of tepid water which the children greedily drank, unrestrained by their parents who seemed to consider water a luxury, from the appearance of their rooms. A sick child lay in a rear room gasping for breath while its mother stirred up a fire, the heat of which made the atmosphere terrible. The bedrooms were small and dark with windows 13 by 15 inches in size for ventilation. These opened on stifling hallways and admitted an atmosphere almost as bad as that within. The yard was unclean as were the closets which gave forth terrible stenches. Under the tenement was a cellar, the rear part of which was occupied. The rooms were four in number and were divided by a narrow hallway, the ceiling only seven feet high.

" On one side of the place lived a man about 40 years of age. He was a dealer in cheese and stored most of his goods in the back room. A little place opened off the room. It contained a dilapidated mattress while on the floor was a heap of accumu-

lated sweepings and rubbish. There were no windows or other means of ventilation and the apartments could not well be fouler. The walls were cracked and blackened and there was a squalor visible that was revolting.

"'This place ought to be condemned,' said the inspector, 'as no one is allowed to sleep in a cellar, much less in a cell like this.'

"Leaving the room, the officer crossed the hall and gave a knock at a dingy looking door. It was opened slowly and a fearful picture was viewed. In a little dark room in which scarcely a beam of light could penetrate were five persons. A dusky Bohemian sat at a board making cigars and beside him was his wife. Crouching away in the corner as if afraid of the light were three pretty little Bohemian children. Their faces bore traces of what the absence of air and cleanliness are to the childish thousands who annually die in these dives.

"A little room not much larger than a good-sized packing case was the sleeping room of the children, and the parents slept in the larger room.

"'Dis house is owned py Astor,' said the Bohemian proudly, as the filth was spoken of.

"'More's the pity,' said the humane sanitary officer as he left the underground rooms and turned to the foul yard whose atmosphere seemed delicious in contrast."

The *Tribune* apologized for its daily recording of the shocking stenches, the darkness, disease, and overcrowding in the slums:

"New York has never had either a Zola or a Dickens. More than half a million men, women and children live in tenements on Manhattan Island. It is a world in itself, for streams of immigrants from every quarter of the globe have been drawn into the seething current of metropolitan life. It is a world strained with labor, racked with pain, heartsore from grief, crazed with passion, goaded on to crime, weary unto death yet condemned always to be struggling for life in dark waters. In midwinter our preachers tell us there is such a world and all the year round we feel its hot breath striking us full in the face, yet how little is known about it!

"There is so much moralizing from the pulpit, so much free-

hand drawing in the architects' offices, so much legislation at the Capitol, and yet so little knowledge of the evils of tenement house life and the needs of our working class."

The tenement-house investigation petered out. Only from time to time was there a report from the lower depths, such as the death-roll in some Astor tenements in 1880:

145 East Fourth Street, four deaths (two under five years of age); 419 East Fourteenth, four deaths (three under five); 404 East Fifteenth, six deaths (three under five); 422 East Sixteenth, three deaths (one under five); 155 East Twenty-sixth, three deaths (two under five); 262 Elizabeth, three deaths (two under five); 428 East Fifth, three deaths (two under five); 506 East Fifth, three deaths (one under five); 513 East Fifth, three deaths (one under five); 515 East Fifth, three deaths (one under five); 520 East Fifth, three deaths (two under five); 521 East Fifth, three deaths (two under five); 729 Tenth Avenue, five deaths (one under five); 262 First Avenue, six deaths (five under five); 352 West Sixteenth, three deaths (one under five); 354 West Sixteenth, three deaths (all under five); 430 West Seventeenth, four deaths (two under five); 245 West Thirtieth, three deaths (one under five).

The Board of Health figures for 1880 showed 17,816 deaths in 10,609 tenements of which 10,101 deaths had been of children under five — 56 per cent of all deaths. On the other hand, there had been 7,538 deaths in 6,864 private houses, of whom 2,999 had been children under five — or 39 per cent.

Fire alternated with disease in the tenements. Early in the morning of October 26, 1881 the cry of "Fire!" rang out in West Sixteenth Street. A wooden house, set on the rear part of a twenty-five by hundred-foot lot in back of 352 West Sixteenth, two stories and an attic, all occupied, was ablaze. William Parkinson, his wife, and two children were trapped in the attic, their rickety wooden stairway in flames. There was no fire escape on this Astor tenement. Parkinson threw out a mattress and bedding and his little girl was dropped to it. She was badly hurt. The mother, a heavy woman, jumped, but struck the brick wall opposite and suffered a severe spinal injury in her fall. The father let himself down out of the window, the baby

in one arm. The rotten sill gave way. He dropped the baby on the mattress and tried to fling himself out toward the brick wall to avoid falling on top of it. Both were badly hurt. The loss to the tenants from the fire was $375, to the Astors $300.

And still the rentals poured into the dignified, austere offices of the Astor Estate in West Twenty-sixth Street. In 1881 the Astor, Rhinelander, and other large properties, acting in unison, heralded good times by raising rents ten per cent. "The rich grow richer in New York and the poor poorer," a big real-estate dealer confided to a *Tribune* reporter. At a Socialist rally the contrast was cited between realty values increasing by $70,000,000 between 1875 and 1880 while realty taxes fell during that period from $32,000,000 to $28,000,000. The real-estate dealer and the Socialist speaker, no matter how much they may have detested each other's ideas, agreed on one conclusion!

The tide of humanity, still sweeping in from Europe, easily sustained the ten-per-cent rise in rentals. Astor's slums were crowded because the holds of immigrant ships were congested. The Hamburg sailing ships, the curse of the era, dumped their pathetic loads on New York's docks. The fever ship *Leibnitz* lost 105 of her 544 souls on a seventy-day voyage via the tropics. Entire families were wiped out. Inspectors descended to find a perfect pest-hole in the orlop deck, deep in the bowels of the ship, into which a hundred and fifty immigrants had been crowded. A half pint of water had been the daily allowance, and there was no physician aboard to deal with the intestinal and stomach catarrh and typhus which raged below decks. But the captain had grog to sell.

Federal legislation was asked to replace the burden imposed on New York State in caring for most of the country's immigrants. Tardily in 1882 the federal government passed its first immigrant ship law to temper a system under which "emigrants are treated more like beasts of burden than like human beings, starved and crowded together in an ill-ventilated, ill-fitted, ill-supplied and ill-manned vessel."

The troubles of the steerage appeared strikingly like those of the tenements.

In 1884 another legislative committee was at work surveying

the track of disease through the slums. At 414 East Fifteenth Street — an Astor property — six of the sixty-nine tenants had died in 1881. At 406 East Sixteenth, Astor again, the ventilating pipe for the privies was a fake. At 106 Avenue A and 406 East Sixteenth the tenements were so small that there was less than 250 cubic feet of air space for each inmate — a space, in other words, less than six feet by five with an eight-foot ceiling.

An effort to cope with disease in the Avenue A territory was made by the Tompkins Square Homeopathic Dispensary, at 261 East Fourth Street. It served 8,000 to 12,000 patients, making up 20,000 to 30,000 prescriptions a year. But in 1886 the dispensary threatened to close, after twenty-two years of service, because of a $2,844 deficit. Small gifts dribbled in, but none from an Astor was ever listed.

For half a century the slums themselves had been inarticulate. Tenement reform arose mainly from a desire to improve sanitation for the protection of the city as a whole. It was generally agreed in that Victorian age that slum-dwellers made the slums; any legislative effort to improve living conditions ran up against the argument that higher rents must result — a poor service to the poor.

In the 1870's the authentic voice of the tenement-dwellers began to be heard, first through the Cigar Makers Union's demand for separation of home and factory, then through Socialist agitation. In the 1880's arose Henry George, whose *Progress and Poverty* boldly denounced landlordism in terms reminiscent of the 1840's. Many slum-dwellers began to question the doctrine that poverty was part of original sin, the curse put on those who were not clever or cunning.

Henry George's agitation met the broad stream of labour's demand for the eight-hour day, and merged in the epochal city campaign of 1886 to elect George mayor of New York. Tammany and Republican political leaders were aghast at the ground-swell of popular resentment against industrial-financial domination of the city government. Both cast around for candidates of a different stripe to meet the new " Communist peril."

The Republicans called Theodore Roosevelt back from his self-imposed exile in the Dakota Badlands to lead their party.

Had he not been the champion of the stricken law divorcing cigar factories from the tenements? Had he not castigated the "wealthy criminal class" and blasted corruption in his own party? Roosevelt accepted the nomination.

But it was Tammany that must lead the main fight, for it was Tammany that had controlled the masses of the slum-dwellers. The Hall gallantly rose to the occasion by permitting the County Democracy, a reformed wing of the party, to nominate the candidate for mayor. The search for a suitable anti-George man ended as felicitously for them as for the Republicans. Their choice was Abram S. Hewitt, partner of Peter Cooper in the iron business, the philanthropist who ran his factory in the bitter years of the 1873 panic at a hundred-thousand-dollar loss to keep his men working. Hewitt was a champion of the better distribution of wealth, of strong labour unions, employees' stock-ownership, and social insurance. In fact he had brought down upon himself the wrath of conservative editors only a few years before by preaching:

"What right have the working men — the poor men — in the unearned increment in the property of the country? By unearned increment I mean the property which is accumulated without effort by its possessor. For instance I have in my mind's eye a man [William B. Astor] who inherited some real estate in this city which in the lapse of years has grown to enormous value. . . . By no activity of his has he accumulated his wealth. He is allowed to retain possession of it because we do not know how to arrange it better. But is not the working man, who, by his productive labor, made the land rich, entitled to a share of it?"

An ideal candidate, agreed the Tammany bosses. The Old Guard, ensconced in the Union Club, snorted at the spectacle of a radical Republican and a radical Democrat contesting the election against a communist single-taxer. Other Republicans, fearing the triumph of the United Labor Party, quietly made deals with Tammany to swing votes from Roosevelt to Hewitt.

In torchlight parades, harangues from every street corner, in enormous meetings crowded as never before, the candidates expounded their platforms for bringing prosperity with prog-

ress instead of poverty. "The child born in the tenements," thundered Henry George, "has as much right to a foothold on this earth as the child of a Stuyvesant or an Astor, and when he is not granted it, he is robbed." The tumultuous crowd that filled Chickering Hall cheered, shouted, roared approval. "This robbery," continued the candidate, "is the cause of the death of 65 per cent of the children before they reach the age of five in the tenement districts; it is the reason why girls are crowded together in factories and why some people are so degraded as to sell their votes for $2 on election day." The applause, the *Tribune's* reporter noted, was "deafening."

On election day 90,000 votes were counted for Hewitt, 67,000 for George, and 60,000 for Roosevelt.

As for Hewitt, the workingman's friend, once he was mayor he found his hands tied by Tammany. Bitterly disappointed at the trickery, he ran on an independent ticket two years later and then disappeared from political life. He had served his purpose. Roosevelt retired to devote himself to literature and await a more auspicious moment for political resurrection.

Nevertheless the campaign of 1886 had thrown a strong white light on the slums. To John Jacob Astor, a man of sixty-four, proud, unbending aristocrat, the vista opened by that campaign must have been disquieting. Looking down the avenue of the years, he could discern the growing spirit of social democracy. Already it was imperative to use men of the stripe of Roosevelt and Hewitt to hold privilege in its place. Where would it all end? In expropriation; not outright Communist expropriation perhaps, but through such heresies as the income tax, increased taxes on land values? Who could tell?

To Astor and his son, the disgruntled young politician fascinated by the character of Cesare Borgia, the future of America under unbridled democracy seemed more and more dubious. They yearned for a system like the British, where landholding lords held an irrevocable veto.

CHAPTER *iv*

Flight from Reality

THE VERY fragility of Mrs. John Jacob Astor III was a dynastic asset, for she bore her husband but one child, William Waldorf, thus establishing the privilege of primogeniture for the fortune in the fourth generation. Her more robust sister-in-law, Mrs. William Astor, had also done well by the House, for although she had five children, only one, John Jacob IV, was a son. The Astor Estate, split in two, was safe from further fragmentation for at least another generation.

Had she desired, Mrs. John Jacob III could have reigned as Queen of American Society in place of her sister-in-law. But she possessed what was currently known as a certain "Philadelphia languor." Not a striking beauty, she had a charm and piquancy that set her off from the food-sodden *grandes dames* of Fifth Avenue. Fifty years later, with some Victorianism rubbed off, she would have fitted perfectly into café society, for she was nimble-witted, liked the company of writers and artists, and shunned, as far as possible, the sombre pomposities that so delighted Mrs. William Astor. In the most brilliant reception of the 1881 season, given in honour of the French and German delegations, she led in the quadrille with General Boulanger. At a ball she told a sleepy Englishman: "Tarry with us, lawyer; the night is yet young." She broke society's ostracism of Edwin Booth because he was the brother of Lincoln's assassin by seating him at her right hand at a dinner, and then commanding the presence of her peers. At a time when ac-

tresses were barred from ballrooms, Mrs. Astor gave a reception for Mme Ristori that broke the icy front. In her Causeries du Lundi she tried to resurrect the old Knickerbocker times that the Founder had known when Horace dined with Mæcenas.

Mrs. Burton Harrison, society chronicler, recalled that Mrs. Astor's chief aspiration was "to improve the standard of polite life and to cultivate the literary element in her set. She was a brilliant woman full of social and intellectual attainment, and her receptions were wonderful gatherings where one could reckon to meet the celebrities of the world of literature and politics . . . a happy union of the best elements procurable in New York, surrounded by all that wealth and taste could add to originality of conception."

Early in the 1880's the Astors deserted their seigneurial estate at Hyde Park on the Hudson to join the throngs at Newport. Each summer Mrs. Astor gave a great ball at Beaulieu, their noble "cottage," where she appeared in full regalia, covered with $300,000 in diamonds which hung from her ears, ringed her wrists and fingers, clustered about her throat, fell to her bosom, belted her waist, and crowned her hair in a blazing tiara — a spectacle in which she was rivalled only by her puissant sister-in-law.

At these affairs her husband, inclined to gout, was wont to stand off from the garrulous throng, eying them with reserved hauteur or talking quietly with old cronies. Under his wife's tutelage, he became a connoisseur of fine wines, a patron of the arts and collector of fine bindings, frosty and fastidious, but the perfect host at intimate dinners.

It was the distinction of Charlotte Augusta to be not only the first of the great ladies in the Astor family, but the first philanthropist in the grand manner. Her mother-in-law, it was true, had spent her life in good works, but her benefactions never excited a line of newspaper comment. The third Mrs. Astor showered her compassion on the children of the slums — the thousands of boys who wandered barefoot, ragged, and dirty through the streets selling papers, blacking boots, picking pockets. For homes they claimed garbage bins, hallways, the gratings over heated basements. Charles Loring Brace, pioneer of

the Children's Aid Society, opened a six-cent lodging for these waifs which they promptly christened the Astor House.

The West Side hostel for boys was built by Astor, and the industrial school for children of German immigrants on Avenue B received sizable Astor support.

Brace's main work was to ship waifs out to the West to be distributed among farmers, and in this he had Mrs. Astor's enthusiastic help. During the holiday season she usually sent a shipment of a hundred West at twenty dollars a head. One bitter winter morning she was down at the Society's headquarters to oversee a shipment, having first provided them with overcoats, shoes, mittens, caps and mufflers. She spoke tenderly to them on their future life far from the slums. "And your Testaments, boys, have you got them?" she concluded. They had not arrived, so she bustled over to the Bible House, confiding in a companion her sympathy for the "large and needy class" and rejecting praise for her solicitude — "It is so little I can do for them." Cheques from the Astors ranging from one hundred to five hundred dollars "for the poor of the East Side," "for the poor of the 14th Ward," "for Emigration," were attributable to her. By 1886 some eighty thousand street boys had been dispatched to the West. Many criticized the plan as dealing in child slavery, and sorrowful were the horrendous stories of exploitation that seeped back from the West; but given the times when nobody in New York assumed responsibility for the floating orphan population, Western migration was perhaps the best way out.

By a curious irony, a dribble of the money that the Founder had wrested from the Indians returned to them through Mrs. Astor's gifts to Bishop Hare's mission among the Niobrara Indians. Newsboys, Indians, the wretched, the fallen women, all enlisted her sympathy. She helped support the Midnight Mission, whose lodgers, by the very fact of their coming, "disclosed at once the character if not the real name, and thus confessed the worst against themselves." The ladies of the Mission plied the "sidewalks of shame" side by side with the girls, enticing them to come in for refreshments, followed by a period of prayer. After that the girls went out.

"It was the distressing thought that these poor young women (withdrawn for the hour from the haunts of sin and brought into an atmosphere of purity and love) would, as they passed out of our door, yield to the power of habit, or the pressure of *seeming* necessity, and again ply their trade of sin and shame upon the street; or, at best, retire to their wretched abodes where the voice of ribaldry and the intoxicating cup would soon dissipate every serious thought and drown every good resolution." This led Mrs. Astor and the other good ladies to provide a building with cots which gradually widened into a home for Magdalens.

Her biggest benefaction (of course her husband paid the bill) was $225,000 for the Astor Pavilion, the first building of the Memorial Hospital for the Treatment of Cancer, and she was in constant attendance as a member of the board of lady supervisors upon the patients of the Woman's Hospital. Leftovers from her grand affairs went there — flowers, food, fruits — and she induced her relatives to endow beds.

She was interested in waifs probably because she could have but one child, and in hospitals on account of her own frail health. In constant contact with the fashionable physicians of New York, she presented a loving-cup in 1880 to the Academy of Medicine, which Dr. Fordyce Barker, Society's own doctor, accepted touchingly: "It has already been consecrated by the lips of a woman, the aroma of which, let up hope, will ever remain to perpetuate the beautiful sentiment engraved upon it: 'May peace and love be multiplied unto us.'"

One week after the opening of the Astor Pavilion at the cancer hospital, the donor was dead. "The destroyer, more potent than communism or anarchy," observed the *Herald* of December 13, 1887, "is sure of bringing poor humanity to one common level in the end."

The funeral was held on a dark, dismal morning. Every gas jet in Trinity Chapel was lit, casting a rich yellow glow on as distinguished a group of mourners as ever gathered in the city. All the ancient families were there — white-haired merchants who remembered the Founder, millionaires, society leaders, statesmen, judges, generals, clergymen, journalists, authors, art-

ists, fifteen ladies of the board of the Woman's Hospital, eight from the Niobrara League, eight from the Y.W.C.A. Among the pallbearers were Hamilton Fish, the former Secretary of State; John Jay, the former Minister; A. Gracie King; George L. Schuyler; Colonel Alexander Hamilton, her husband's most intimate friend; Colonel Stephen Van Rensselaer Cruger, manager of Trinity Corporation; Francis Hopkinson Smith, the writer.

Mrs. Astor's will, disposing of $300,000, was the most generous ever penned in that family. She gave $35,000 to the Children's Aid Society, $25,000 to the Woman's Hospital, $25,000 to St. Luke's Hospital, $25,000 to the Y.W.C.A., $25,000 to Hampton Institute, $25,000 to Episcopalian domestic missions, as well as smaller bequests.

In her memory, John Jacob gave $60,000 to the Children's Aid Society for the Astor Memorial School in Mott Street and $145,000 for a men's pavilion at the cancer hospital. It was munificent charity, so utterly un-Astorlike that many who had scoffed at the family's name turned to praise.

Too seldom did great ladies of society give the Episcopalian clergy such scope for panegyric essays. The late Mrs. Astor's rector, Dr. Morgan Dix of Trinity, wrote:

"She knew that the woman who stands in the front rank of society of this metropolis ought to represent that society for all that it can be worth to us for truth and virtue and honest living. She knew that such a person must have a high ideal of womanhood; that she must exert a constructive power over her peers and set a good example to her juniors; that she must frown upon the vicious and help those who are good and true of heart; that her doors must be closed against women of dubious reputation, and men whom profligacy makes conspicuous."

Of Mrs. Astor as wife, Dr. Dix was ecstatic: "Her unwavering devotion . . . her unshaken fidelity, love without dissimulation; alas! how often do we miss them in the married state!"

The city saw little of John Jacob after his wife's death. A bad heart confined him to limited activity, and his dread of publicity became morbid. He tried to avoid writing letters or notes and often he advised their recipients to destroy them. He

shared his father's fear of the prowling biographer; William B. had destroyed fifteen packing-cases containing the miscellaneous records and papers left behind by John Jacob Astor. When the Astor offices were moved from Prince Street to West Twenty-sixth, nearly all the remaining books and manuscripts were burned to save a few dollars' truck hire.

In religion Astor was more High Church than the rector of Trinity, as Dr. Dix himself admitted. He urged the importance of beauty and solemnity of ritual. He gave to the "Trinity poor" and was responsible in large measure for the building of the Mission House in the lower wards. Even when abroad he did not fail to remit to "the almoners of Christ's poor." In pious tribute to their father, Astor and his brother erected a splendid altar and reredos at Trinity costing $50,000.

Himself a collector of manuscripts, first editions, incunabula, and exquisitely illuminated missals, Astor gave another $400,000 to the Astor Library, thus matching his grandfather's and father's gifts. A trustee first in 1858 when the library had only 110,000 volumes, he watched its growth to 235,000 volumes by 1875. Despite all criticism, it was still the finest collection in the two Americas of material on architecture, archæology, Orientalia, history, the classics, drama, the fine arts, literature, science, mathematics, political economy, bibliography, and the scholarly periodicals.

But that could not hush those who claimed that a library so meagrely endowed that it had no money for gas light or attendants' salaries at night, whose magazines were unbound, whose halls were heated by stoves, and whose budget provided but $5,000 a year for new acquisitions was, as the *Times* put it, a "sadly impecunious establishment." "The Astor Library," concluded that paper, "must be regarded almost as a great public misfortune because there cannot be a doubt but that had Mr. Astor not founded it, the public would have taken by this time far more effective measures." This library was emphatically not a public library but a daytime workshop for research. Springing to the defence of the trustees, the *Tribune* declared it was "absurd and ungracious to complain because instead of making this magnificent and invaluable donation to the me-

tropolis they [the Astors] did not give us something quite different." This collection was intended for savants and not " the indulgence of an idle habit of intemperate and promiscuous reading."

His father had had to build a new wing soon after the Founder's death, and John Jacob III was obliged to add another extension, giving the library a capacity of 500,000 volumes. The second catalogue was printed at a cost of $40,000, given by Astor. But despite continuing gifts, it was evident that the library's endowment fund of $433,000 was inadequate. What was needed was either a royal gift of $4,000,000 instead of $400,000 during an Astor's lifetime — or public financial support.

Astor, whose admiration for England increased year by year with his distaste for America, spent the last winters of his life in London. There the wealthiest American, the undoubted aristocrat, moved among a select circle of his peers, men solid in their appreciation of the eternal values, of birth, breeding, and position. He found the climate soothing to his pride, so different from strident New York. Respect was given where respect was due, politics were conducted on a high plane by the gentlemen who dominated both parties. The raucous party strife, the thieving politicians, and the blatant demagogues that beset his native land were held in leash in England by century-old traditions, by a ruling class born to govern, by decorous codes which guided the alternating Cabinets of Liberals and Conservatives.

A man of stern principles and rigid adherence to duty, Astor did not allow himself to become an expatriate. After all, great responsibilities clung to his shoulders, and his European sojourns did not extend over a few months of the year. In the winter of 1890 he returned to New York after the holidays and resumed his walks between his Fifth Avenue residence and his Twenty-sixth Street office. Shopkeepers said they could set their timepieces by his punctual appearance each morning at half past nine at his office. Like father, like son. Between two and three he left for the day.

On Friday, February 21, 1890, he did not go to his office.

The Reverend Dr. Dix dashed through a "cold and dreary winter's night" to administer the last sacrament and pray for the reception in heaven of the soul of a man stricken with angina pectoris. He died early the next morning, about the time of day that his grandfather and his father had died.

That Sunday the rector of Trinity preached the valedictory.

"One who was here with us last Sunday," he said, "has passed away. My heart is full when I think of him. A noble life is ended so far as this world is concerned — a great heart beats no more.

"What we have lost, what the poor have lost, what the children have lost, I dare not stop to think. Who can fill his place? I dare not ask. . . .

"To you is left the record of the great name honorably borne, of a strong Christian character, the example of spotless honor, of integrity, of lofty aims and faithful stewardship for God. . . . He went from us clear in mind, humble as a little child full of love of God, strong in his trust in Christ."

A poem appeared in the *Herald* commemorating his death:

Burdened by business, scholarly in taste,
  Behind the millionnaire the man was hid.
His bounty leaned to wisdom, not to waste,
  His left hand knew not what his right hand did.

Therefore 'tis meet that we who owe him more
  Than gratitude alone may hope to span,
His stately deeds should hold in precious store,
  The millionnaire may die, but not the man.

Bishop Potter and Dr. Dix officiated at the final rites at Trinity Chapel, attended by the aristocracy, although not by his brothers, William and Henry the Forgotten. At Trinity Cemetery his son, William Waldorf, threw a handful of earth into the grave and was led away on the point of collapse.

Encomiums filled the press. The *Times*, which had assailed him so bitterly twenty years before in the Tweed Ring exposé, declared that "the great fortune which he commanded could

not have been put into better hands and thousands and thousands of God's poor and unfortunate have had their wretched lives brightened because he lived."

The *World* praised him as "noted for good citizenship." Only the *Herald* of 1890 was vaguely reminiscent of the *Herald* of 1848, which had called the Founder a "self-invented money-making machine." That journal editorialized:

"It is a matter of regret that those who have the ability to immortalize their memory by gracious deeds of charity seldom embrace the opportunity; but the laws of human nature render it well nigh impossible. The constitutional peculiarities which enable one to slowly amass a fortune are themselves a bar to wide generosity. The desire to give freely lags behind where the faculty of accumulation is doing its utmost. The habit of taking allows the duty of giving no chance to emphasize itself."

His comrades of the Loyal Legion, meeting at Delmonico's, passed a memorial resolution: "To his wife he owed the example of her own high ideals and the habitual practice of a broad and generous sympathy with all classes. Her influence sprang from the daily self-sacrifice of her life, which was exemplified when after the first Federal reverses of the Civil War, she accepted without murmur his determination to serve in the field in the cause of the Nation."

In death Astor was as curt as in life. His will contained no involved trusts. He left $100,000 to St. Luke's Hospital, $50,000 to the Metropolitan Museum (to which his wife's costly laces had previously been given), $100,000 to the Memorial Hospital for the Treatment of Cancer. To the Astor Library he left $400,000 as an endowment for purchasing books and $50,000 to provide payment of trustees for attending meetings (making his total gifts to the library about $850,000). The rest of his estate went to his son, William Waldorf. His philanthropy loomed large, but if he gave away, in life and will, $2,000,000 (the outside estimate), he gave no more in proportion to his wealth than did the Founder, who was excoriated for penuriousness.

The new forty-two-year-old head of the House of Astor inherited properties valued at between $75,000,000 and $100,-

000,000. Charles F. Southmayd, the crusty old trustee and legal guardian of the Astor Estate, a man not given to florid overstatement, calculated the whole estate at something under $200,000,000, in contrast to press estimates ranging from $150,000,000 to $400,000,000. When the shares held by William the Negligent and Henry the Forgotten, brothers of the late departed, and by the collaterals on the distaff side, were combined, it seemed likely that old Southmayd's reckoning came near the truth. An exact appraisal of such bounding properties as the old Eden farm north and west of Forty-second Street and Broadway and the Thompson farm along Fifth Avenue was impossible; the official tax valuation put on the myriad Astor properties hardly corresponded to the amount such canny judges of real estate as John Jacob III and his son would assess.

There were few to doubt that Astor had died the wealthiest American, just as did his grandfather and his father. And that despite the division of the fortune between John Jacob and William. The Founder had left $20,000,000 in 1848; under William Backhouse's twenty-seven-year regency until 1875, the fortune doubled to $40,000,000; by 1890 that figure at least quadrupled. John Jacob's half of the $40,000,000 had increased during his fifteen-year regency to double his father's entire hoard. Taken as a unit, the Astor Estate was nearly as majestic in its lonely eminence in 1890 as it had been in 1848. William Waldorf, possessor of but half that pile, was still a richer man, the best estimates agreed, than William K. Vanderbilt, Jay Gould, or the newcomer John D. Rockefeller.

Estimating the late Astor's income at $5,000,000 a year, the London *Spectator* declared he was perhaps the richest man in the world, the Czar of Russia and the Prince of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen excepted. Nobody in England, not even the Duke of Westminster, received an income so great. And Astor's wealth was immutable, not subject to the chances of business or speculation, nor did he need to scatter it, as did the Czar and other potentates, on enormous establishments. Nevertheless the *Spectator* commiserated: " There is something pathetic about the death or rather the life " of Astor. He could not enjoy the regal splendour of titled nobility, he did not thrill to the

excitement of the financial and industrial struggle, he got little exhilaration from the power that wealth conferred. Cut off from the world by lack of passionate interests, he could only do work that others could have done as well, and retire inside his own consciousness. Lacking imagination, he could not have known how to give away millions although the *Spectator* suggested that he might have extended the Founder's benefaction by scattering libraries through the United States.

If such an estimate seemed negative, John Jacob, compared to his father, was the spirit of positivism. He flung the Astor domain across the Harlem into the broad reaches of the Bronx, he erected Wall Street buildings which in their day were awesome masses of iron and brick, built miles of brownstone fronts, invested his surplus wisely in gilt-edged securities, supervised the properties of his brothers and the collateral branches.

More than that, he gave to the populace the concept of an Astor befitting his fortune and fame. Under Republican leadership the country was bounding toward a fabulous future. The millionaire was the symbol of the epoch, and John Jacob Astor, the super-millionaire, was the hero of the nation's Mammon-worshipping daydreamers. He looked, he acted, he was the very apotheosis of millionairedom, and so he set the Astor name where the Astor fortune already was, at the peak of American society.

William Waldorf, new head of the House, was intensely aware of this pre-eminent position. One-time state Senator, one-time Minister to Italy, author of two novels, and now possessor of the biggest fortune in America, he was determined to avenge himself on a public and a press which had rebuffed his Congressional ambitions. Sensitive to the point of morbidity, proud as no Astor had ever been, self-centred even beyond his forebears, he was determined to stamp the mark of his superiority upon his native city. Although he had no taste for society, he resolved to build a great palace up the Avenue to mark his position as leader of American bluebloods. His father's house at Thirty-third Street, archaic now in the magnificence of the 1890's, would be razed to make way for the world's greatest hotel, to carry his own name, Waldorf. New York could defeat

him for Congress, but it could not defeat his plan to make his name the synonym for Babylonian splendour.

Full of such plans, Astor and his wife went to Newport in the summer of 1890 to occupy the parental mansion, Beaulieu. Imagine his dumbfounded amazement to learn that his aunt, Mrs. William Astor, was sending out cards bearing simply the name: "Mrs. Astor." Outraged to the core at this impudent reversal of the rights of primogeniture, he informed the perplexed postmaster of Newport that mail addressed simply "Mrs. Astor" must be delivered to his wife, as she was the only Astor in Newport entitled to be known as simply "Mrs. Astor."

At Bailey's Beach and in the great "cottages" that lined Bellevue Avenue dowagers and debs gossiped happily and impartially over the delicious Astor versus Astor war, for spite and envy combined to take pleasure in Mrs. William's discomfiture and Mrs. William Waldorf's combativeness. Soon the metropolitan press was roaring with delight over the precious news from society's summer capital, and then the nation.

Black fury seized William Waldorf. A curse on America, on both its lower and its upper classes! All during the late summer months he was preparing for the most momentous step of his life. He would shake the dust of this impertinent, despicable land from his feet and retire to a country which appreciated birth, breeding, and the etiquette of precedence. He resigned from all his clubs and divorced himself from all active interest in his native land — save for his holdings in the Astor Estate. These he placed in the hands of his friend and distant relative Charles A. Peabody, Jr., as manager. On September 27, 1890 — seven months after his father's death — he sailed with his family to England.

That ended the American chronicle of the senior branch of the House of Astor.

BOOK FOUR

THE MRS. ASTOR

CHAPTER *i*

Caroline the Magnificent

FLIGHT from reality by William Waldorf Astor and his wife left his redoubtable aunt, Mrs. William Astor, unchallenged as *the* Mrs. Astor of American Society.

Long acknowledged queen, she had a hold too firm, a will too imperious, resources too inexhaustible to be challenged successfully. If any asked why she clutched the sceptre so tightly to her ample bosom, the answer was that she was born a Schermerhorn, had married an Astor, and had the will to rule.

This desire was whipped into a fierce passion by the humiliation of being the wife of William Astor, junior member of the family, despised by John Jacob III as a shiftless drifter. William escaped his brother's taunts and wife's reproaches in the seclusion of his Hudson estate, Ferncliff, his yacht, the *Ambassadress,* his Florida refuge. He cared not a fig for social position, business responsibility, or the covert jests along Fifth Avenue arising from his prolonged absences from New York. Passionately he loved horses, yachts, his own pleasures; and he ignored the rest of the world so long as his remittances arrived regularly from the Astor Estate.

Well, if William had little interest in seeing his four daughters brought out properly, or in rearing his only son, John Jacob IV, to a respected position in New York Society, then Mrs. Astor would have to assume the task single-handed. She would embellish the family name, marry her daughters well, and prepare her son for his high future. Lacking beauty or brilliance, she would mix ambition and wealth in a heady potion

exhilarating to her Knickerbocker blood, satisfying to an otherwise thwarted life, helpful in establishing premier social standing for her children.

Having, by 1872, borne five, one of whom would be *the* John Jacob of the next generation, Mrs. Astor was ready for her fling. Her oldest daughter, Emily, eighteen, was ripe for debut, and others would be blooming within the decade for the all-important event of their lives — marriage into the aristocracy. By great good fortune Ward McAllister was also ready for *his* fling. Mrs. Astor needed, for her designs, a man who could fill some of her husband's outward responsibilities, who could act as chamberlain, social secretary, organizer, in assisting her to the throne of Society.

The providential McAllister came of distinguished if somewhat threadbare South Carolina ancestry. His first name betokened his relationship to old Sam Ward of the great banking house of pre-Civil War times. He had blood, breeding, an exquisite feeling for the niceties and proprieties, a genius for sociability, and needed only money. He was ready to be retained, and offered as recommendation his hand in the two memorable balls — Mrs. John C. Stevens's great affair in College Place, and the Schermerhorns' fancy-dress ball in exclusive LaFayette Place. He had been polished in London, gaining the attention of the Duke of Westminster at Almack's, where he had been paced twice around the rooms by that great gentleman in order to break the London ice. Coming back to America, he nursed a desire to establish here the social hierarchy he so much admired in the old country, to decide "who have the right to create and lead society."

"At this period," as he relates it, "a great personage (representing a silent power that had always been recognized and felt in this community so long as I can remember by not only fashionable people but by the solid, old quiet element as well) had daughters to introduce into society, which brought her prominently forward and caused her at once to take a leading position. She possessed great administrative power and it was soon put to good use and felt by society. I then for the first time was brought into contact with this grande dame and at once recog-

nized her ability and felt that she would become society's leader and that she was admirably qualified for the position."

So it was that Ambition met its tool, in order to etch the pattern of the Patriarchs, a coterie of twenty-five families who combined birth, breeding, and wealth. The Astors, Schermerhorns, Langdons, Kanes, Warrens, Livingstons, Duncans, Hamersleys, Rutherfurds, Remsens, Rives, Van Rensselaers qualified, for in them English or Dutch Colonial blood was combined with wealth. Mere money was not enough: "We wanted the money power but not in any way to be controlled by it," McAllister explained.

To the joint balls each Patriarch could invite five gentlemen and four ladies, and two "distinguished strangers" selected from Baltimore, Charleston, Philadelphia, and Boston, from London and the Continent.

In the Patriarchs was the genesis of New York Society of the last third of the nineteenth century. Generously McAllister conceded Mrs. Astor's paramount qualities for sorting claimants to social honour: she had "all the qualities necessary — good judgment and a great power of analysis of men and women, a thorough knowledge of all their surroundings, a just appreciation of the rights of others and, coming herself from an old Colonial family, a good appreciation of the value of ancestry; always keeping it near her and bringing it in, in all social matters, but also understanding the importance and power of the new element; recognizing it and fairly and generously awarding to it a prominent place."

A fierce competition ensued to be members of the Patriarchs, or on the twenty-five Patriarchs' lists. Mothers pounded on the doors demanding admittance. "Kind sir," they beseeched McAllister, "I have a daughter." "This was Europeanizing New York too rapidly," so the Queen and her Lord Chamberlain set up the Family Circle Dancing Class, the junior Patriarchs.

The hierarchy established, the best families beamed with pride. It was almost as if, in 1872, they had surveyed the pushing, bustling ranks of wealth and found them without form; confusion was upon the face of Society, and one and all they sighed: "Let there be rank," and there was rank. Millionaires

created by fat Civil War contracts, by speculations in government bonds, by the Republican tariff, by railroad consolidations, poured into New York from interior cities that Mrs. Astor had barely heard of. (She never visited the hinterland, not even Washington. If America would see her, let it come to Fifth Avenue.) These *nouveaux riches* demanded the finest suites in the hotels, the gaudiest boxes in the theatres, at the Academy of Music, at the racetracks. They talked incessantly not of blood and birth and breeding, but of money and how to make it, and affected to look down upon the rare old New York aristocracy boasting three generations or more. An arbiter was obviously needed.

Mrs. Astor was not awed by their wealth. Her husband drew sustenance from a fortune estimated at fifty million dollars. An Astor could look with contempt at the biggest hoard any of the *nouveaux riches* could exhibit. As for lineage, she could trace her blood back to old Jacob Janse Schermerhorn, who arrived in Beverwyck (Albany) from Holland some time in the late 1630's; to Aernout Cornelison Viele, a fur-trader like old Astor, whose daughter married Simon Schermerhorn; to another Schermerhorn who managed a Beekman manor up the Hudson and married a Beekman girl; and to Augustus Van Cortlandt and Catherine Barclay. Indeed, through Catherine Mrs. Astor could trace her lineage right back to James I of Scotland. Her grandfather, Peter Schermerhorn, was a ship's chandler who may well have outfitted many of old Astor's vessels.

Youngest of eight children of Abraham Schermerhorn, Caroline had undoubtedly made the most stunning marriage of them all; still, her sisters had wed into the Bayards of Delaware, the New York Joneses, the Suydams, the Irvings, and the Welleses. There was, in fact, hardly an old New York family that could not trace some vague relationship to their Queen.

If there had been no queens before Mrs. Astor, there were at any rate grand duchesses, and of these Mrs. August Belmont was the most formidable. The daughter of Oliver Hazard Perry, she was reputed the most lavish of all New York's entertainers in that period between the Civil War and the 1880's. But Mrs. Astor did not like either Jews or Catholics, and August

MRS. WILLIAM ASTOR

(née Caroline Schermerhorn). The *Mrs. Astor, reared in luxury, born to rule, acknowledged queen of society, she clutched the sceptre tightly. From the portrait by Carolus Duran.*

PHOTO, BROWN BROTHERS

Belmont, American representative of the Rothschilds, was undeniably Jewish. The Knickerbockracy, whose English Colonial forebears had been Church of England and whose Dutch forebears had owed allegiance to the Dutch Reformed Church, had largely coalesced in the American branch of the Church of England. In religion they were High Church Episcopalian, in politics Regular Stalwart Republican; August Belmont on the other hand was Jewish and Democratic (although that heresy was mitigated by his stand for sound money). So the Belmonts were not Patriarchs, nor were they invited to the super-exclusive Patriarchal balls. The Astorian-Belmontian antipathy was mutual. At the Belmont table talk was apt to race around the world, to be international and brilliant, for the lords of finance mingled with titled lords, with leaders in the world of music, letters, the arts and sciences. Such conversation was too heady for Mrs. Astor's subjects, and they loyally stood by their Queen, with occasional desertions when Mrs. Belmont had some unusually appetizing title with which to dazzle the rather staid and dour aristocrats. Not that Mrs. Astor lacked for lords from England and the Continent, but Mrs. Belmont's lords were of a livelier stripe — themselves men of money on a tour of the Wild West to inspect the railways or mines in which they had been interested by Belmont, international middleman between America's raw resources and Europe's capital. They were apt, too, to look upon the doting mothers of Mrs. Astor's set as too dull an assortment of *genus Americanus* to bother with, even though they all had rich daughters aching for titles.

Far more menacing however than the Belmont threat was that presented by the rising Vanderbilts. William K. Vanderbilt ranked second in wealth only to John Jacob III; and he was of plebeian origin. His grandfather, the famous Commodore, had been a Staten Island ferryboat man with execrable manners. His father, William H., was a sober fellow cast in the mould of William B. Astor, who extended the Vanderbilt rail fortune until it mastered twelve thousand miles of tracks and commanded the route between New York and Chicago. It was not until the third generation — as in the Astor family — that the Vanderbilts felt yearnings for social recognition. Across their path lay

Mrs. Astor, who did not approve of railroad money. The rough way the old Commodore had tossed about leading bluebloods, including the Astors, in the shocking New York Central affair of 1867 had left wounds yet unhealed.

The Vanderbilts hooted at the Astor superiority. Just who were they to complain of judges and legislatures corrupted, of competing railroads seized, of vast floods of water transmuted into gold through New York Central stock? Something could be said of the origins of the Astor fortune, of defrauded and debauched Indians, of opium smuggled into Canton. As for political piety, was it for the Astors — whitewashers of the Tweed Ring — to complain? Whatever might be said of railway practice, it could compare favourably with the Astors' East Side slums. Such was the Vanderbilt defence.

More telling than words was W. K. Vanderbilt's decision to build a two-million-dollar palace on Fifth Avenue at Fifty-second Street, beside which Mrs. Astor's mansion would be a mere coachhouse. His brother, Cornelius, built another great palace at Fifty-Seventh Street. In despair Mrs. Astor turned to her husband for a fitting reply, but William could see no sense in spending millions for another house on the Avenue when he hardly ever was seen in the one he did own.

The Vanderbilts intensified the social offensive. Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt put nine million dollars — an unprecedented sum — into her marble palace at Newport; Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt matched her with The Breakers, even larger. Mrs. Astor's cottage, Beechwood, seemed modest indeed compared with those great piles.

Society was torn. In self-defence it must ally itself with Mrs. Astor against ostentatious vulgarity which it could not hope to match. But who could resist the temptation to accept invitations to the Vanderbilts', to see with their own eyes the interior of these vast houses, the acres of gilt and velvet and tapestries and Oriental rugs and French paintings, to feel the thrill of going to dinner between two solid walls of flunkeys in livery?

Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt announced the opening of her new town house for March 26, 1883. Twelve hundred invitations

were issued, including most of bluebloodry, and hundreds who had nothing but riches to recommend them. Only one name was missing which should have been there. It was Mrs. Astor's.

The oversight was brought to Mrs. Vanderbilt's attention. Oh, dear, no, there had been no oversight, she explained. She just didn't know Mrs. Astor and it was impossible, wasn't it, to invite a complete stranger to one's house?

Her statement was literally true. These two ladies had been circulating indefatigably from dinner table to ball in the narrow confines of Manhattan's Upper Tendom for twenty years, but Mrs. Vanderbilt had never been introduced to Mrs. Astor.

The Vanderbilt snub was too much for the leader of New York Society. As Mrs. Astor explained it to a friend: " My dear, we have no right to exclude those whom the growth of this great country has brought forward provided they are not vulgar in speech and appearance. The time has come for the Vanderbilts! "

Mrs. Astor sent Mrs. Vanderbilt her calling card and received, in return, an invitation to the great fancy-dress ball just in time to order a Venetian dress of dark-coloured velvet and satin, the velvet embroidered with real gold roses, the satin worked with pearls. The front of her low-cut corsage was covered with rare jewels, the inside of her long flowing sleeves were pearl-encrusted. A small standing collar surmounted the corsage. Her black wig — worn to defy age's ravages — was partly flowing, partly covered with plumes and an aigrette of diamonds. Mrs. Astor no longer danced, but she managed the Star Quadrille, in which gauzy young ladies with electric-lighted stars on their foreheads danced opposite young gentlemen in Henry III costumes. All in all, it was the most splendid ball held in the history of New York, well meriting the squads of policemen who held off the curious thousands blocking Fifth Avenue. For Mrs. Vanderbilt it was worth every cent and every thought spent upon it, for she and Mrs. Astor remained on the best of terms until she was divorced and became Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont. Mrs. Astor could not stand divorcees — at that time. But

W. K. Vanderbilt remained on her list and Cornelius's name was added.

Some of the older families were bitter, and bitterest of all was John Armstrong Chanler, Mrs. Astor's grandnephew, who considered his Astor blood the least of his assets even if it was the source of his wealth. Once New York Society, he complained, had been as blue-blooded and exclusive as Charleston's; even William B. Astor had had the " acumen to ally his plebeian self with the aristocratic daughter of General John Armstrong." But after Mrs. Astor let down the bars to the Vanderbilts, " any wealthy California cad whose dad had struck it rich in the sluices or Chicago pork packer with his vulgar overfed big-busted hussies can butt in and have their ungainly boots licked daily by a sycophantic, Wall Street-dominated, Mammon-led press which daily exhibited their routs and antics in the public eye."

That was hardly true. Mrs. Astor never accepted the Goulds. The Harrimans pounded at the doors for years, and in vain. And J. P. Morgan and John D. Rockefeller, who personified the rising financial power, disdained even to knock, perhaps in distaste for what they may have considered insipid loiterers, without salt or savour.

The Vanderbilts sealed their triumph in the Metropolitan Opera and Real Estate Company. In this they were joined by certain old families such as the Astors and Roosevelts whose taste for music had developed too late to be accommodated in any of the six boxes at August Belmont's Academy of Music on Fourteenth Street. Mrs. Astor, conscious of her social power for good, stamped approval on the Opera venture despite the unfortunate necessity of allowing Jay Gould, George F. Baker, and William Rockefeller and those " California cads," Darius O. Mills and Collis P. Huntington, to claim boxes in order to meet the threatened deficits.

Well might the Astors sponsor the new Opera, for its building was being erected far uptown at Thirty-ninth Street, fifteen blocks above fashionable Madison Square, but only three blocks from nondescript Longacre, where the gem properties of the Astor Estate were located. The Opera Building foreshadowed

the day when dozens of theatres would cluster about rechristened Times Square, skyrocketing the realty values of the Eden and Cosine farms.

The Metropolitan opened in a blaze of glory in 1883 with all eyes focused on the two Golden Horseshoes, and especially upon Mrs. Astor in Box No. 7 and Mrs. Vanderbilt in Box No. 6, the two locations which offered the widest view of their occupants.

Monday was Mrs. Astor's night at the Opera, because that was the night of her Patriarch and Assembly balls. Punctually at nine she arrived, often on the arm of her chamberlain, Ward McAllister (William Astor detested opera). During the first intermission she remained in her box bursting with the fire of a hundred diamonds, while her subjects came to pay her court. Rarely did she wait for the opera to end, for she must supervise preparations for the ball. Her regal exit was the signal for a rustle in other boxes as their occupants left also for the ball.

Unfortunately the decorator of the Opera House had miscalculated his colour scheme for the boxes — they failed to serve as proper settings for the toilets of the grand ladies. A timely fire gutted the building, and because the number of stockholders entitled to boxes had declined, the Golden Horseshoes were replaced by a single tier, immediately named the Diamond Horseshoe, in honour of Mrs. Astor's resplendence.

Irreverent John Armstrong Chanler, one of the town's *jeunesse dorée*, viewed his grandaunt and her bejewelled cohorts and was inspired to write a sonnet:

A fecund sight for the philosopher —
Rich as Golconda's mine in lessons rare —
The gem-bedizened " horse shoe " at the Opera,
Replete with costly hags and matrons fair!
His votaresses doth Mammon here array,
His Amazonian Phalanx dread to face!
To Mammon there do they their homage pay;
Spangled with jewels, satins, silk and lace,
Crones whose old bosoms in their corsets creak;
Beldames whose slightest glance would fright a horse;

Ghouls — when they speak one hears a grave-mole squeak —
Their escorts parvenus of feature coarse.
A rich array of Luxury and Vice!
But, spite of them, the music's very nice.

In the decade of the 1880's Mrs. Astor reached highest fame as the "première hôtesse of the imperial entertainments." With Ward McAllister behind the throne scheming amazing novelties, serving as *arbiter elegantarium,* acting as ambassador plenipotentiary and minister extraordinary in adjusting society's rivalries, no power arose to challenge Mrs. Astor. Mrs. Vanderbilt was well content, and all was right with the world until Mrs. Astor's brother-in-law, John Jacob III, died. The hereditary Astor plate thereupon descended to William Waldorf in token of his position as head of the House. Between the two branches there had been little warmth; now William Waldorf could see that his right to recognition was thwarted by the actual supremacy of his Aunt Lina. Then began the celebrated social dispute of Astor versus Astor for the right to the unadorned title "Mrs. Astor." It was the Mrs. Astor of Beechwood versus the Mrs. Astor of Beaulieu, the one fearing the ignominy of being relegated to a dowager position, the other egged on by her fiercely contentious husband.

Millions of American women eyed intently this battle of the millionairesses while the press crowded the sidelines, pencil in hand, feverishly noting the pushing and pulling of the adversaries. Mrs. William Astor was never more resplendent, never entertained more generously. Ward McAllister ransacked his fertile mind for ever more clever *fêtes champêtres,* for ever more ingenious favours for his lady's guests, ever more sprightly novelties in décor, music, and food. The Sunday supplements dilated on the spectacle: Mrs. William Astor's diamonds were catalogued, her great triumphs of the past were recounted, her distinguished ancestry noted. Mrs. William Waldorf Astor was handicapped by the necessity of deeper mourning; but the papers generously tried to even up the battle by detailing her exquisite beauty, her triumphs at the Italian court as wife of the

American Minister to Rome, her friendships among the titled personages of Europe.

Town Topics, society's scandal sheet and the most widely read of all society papers, sided with the younger Mrs. Astor. The elder was declared to have been pensive in her black pearls, brooding "over the question of primogeniture" at the Casino Ball to the British Admiral. Did Mrs. William Astor think it was worth all the "money, worry and heartburn" to continue the battle? "With a pertinacity worthy of a better cause she has worn herself out in the endeavor not to be a part of Society and an aid to its advancement in worthy directions but to reign over it and have her subjects stand in awe of her power. At 60 years of age she finds her position disputed. She is at war with nearly every woman in the Astor family and all that there is to repay her for the turmoil and ridicule that beset her is the acknowledgment by the Lord High Steward [Ward McAllister] that she really wears the crown."

Who wore the most diamonds? debated Colonel Mann, the *enfant terrible* of society journalism. Was it the elder Mrs. Astor or Nelly Farren, the actress? Nelly "probably has more diamond garters," he decided. He proposed that both be exhibited at the Chicago World's Fair, or that Mrs. Astor appear at the next Charity Ball wheeling her jewels in a barrow.

Arriving late from Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt's dinner, she was described as entering the Casino like a "meteor." She took her seat with an air that "might be expected of a woman borne down by a terrible weight of precious stones and then she proceeded to scintillate for the benefit of the dim throng that gazed in speechless awe upon her magnificence." She tried to sit back, but great brackets of diamonds, with which her entire back was overspread, stuck in her and she was compelled to sit bolt upright like a figure in the Eden Musee, unhappy, ungainly, but, "Heaven be praised, gorgeous."

The rivalries of Mrs. Astor's "swells" — who admitted the Vanderbilts and other parvenus to their affairs — and the "howling swells," under Mrs. William Waldorf Astor and other leaders of the ultra-smart younger set, came to a climax when

the "howling swells" in charge of the Casino Ball listed "Mrs. William Astor" as a patroness. In a stinging letter to Mrs. Egerton Winthrop, Mrs. William Astor charged she had been personally insulted by the addition of "William" to her name. On the other hand Marion Langdon, of the collateral branch, asserted that Mrs. William Astor had been altogether too gay in the 1890 season for a person supposedly in mourning for a brother-in-law, and switched her allegiance to the younger Mrs. Astor.

But the truth was that the younger Mrs. Astor's concern in the conflict never matched her husband's bitterness. Her interest centred not in vain striving for the title of Mrs. Astor, but upon her children, William Waldorf, Jr. (later to be known as Waldorf Astor), John Jacob V, and Gwendolyn Enid, a babe in arms. So she welcomed her husband's surrender and flight from America.

If millions hung on the latest word from Newport about the battle of the Astors, it was because there was no Hollywood to amuse and bemuse the populace. In a way society in that period between the panic of 1873 and the opening of the new century provided a better show than Hollywood did in later decades. In place of pasteboard palaces, queens but recently graduated from beauty parlours, and kings recruited from the extra list, there were veritable castles on Fifth Avenue, inhabited by true potentates who ruled without benefit of silver screen, and by authentic ladies, whose pedigrees could be traced to the 1600's and beyond, and whose gems flashed convincingly in ornate art gallery-ballrooms which copied faithfully the finest salons of Paris.

These mighty persons were wrapped in an aura of magnificence by a dutiful press. Millions of women debated the merits of their favourite society figures as eagerly as movie fans champion their Hollywood idols today. Society was a mirror of wealth, fashion, and culture — a glamorous pageant of balls and dinners in Manhattan mansions, of *fêtes champêtres* in idyllic Newport and horse-races at Saratoga, of music and millionaires crossbred into opera.

In this arena Mrs. Astor was doing what Vanderbilt, Gould,

Harriman, and Hill were doing with railroads, and Morgan in industry — creating the "community of interests," that "perfect harmony" and centralization of control that marked the emergence of modern America.

If the first letter of "Society" seemed to be a dollar mark, that was because of New York's peculiar position as one of the few great world-cities which was not also a political capital. The absence of an international set of diplomats and of national political leaders emphasized the gilt-edged character of society, and inclined it to be clannish and inbred, more frivolous even than London and Paris, where birth, breeding, and social position often entailed a sense of ruling-class obligation.

The result was a certain boredom, even stupidity, in the great affairs presided over by *the* Mrs. Astor. The minds of her peers were apt to be as tawdry as their footmen's and their table talk differed little in kind from that heard below stairs.

To a person of lively intelligence, the great dinners which were Mrs. Astor's triumph proved particularly unrewarding. Mrs. Winthrop Astor Chanler, an in-law, complained that there was nothing for amusement save vast amounts of elaborate food served on silver and silver-gilt dishes, with many varieties of wine. After soup, fish, entree and a first course of meat, Roman punch was served to stimulate flagging tongues and stomachs for the remainder of the two- to three-hour rite. In fact, as *Town Topics* was grieved to hear, Mrs. Astor was serving indiscriminately the finest champagnes, Johannisberger at fifteen dollars a bottle, and 1847 Amontillado at suppers for three hundred.

In a mellower moment Society's scandal sheet admitted that her weekly dinners carried "more interest to Mrs. Astor's friends in Society than it would be easy to indicate. Mrs. Astor is a wonderfully clever woman, gifted with remarkable administrative ability, and her great wealth joined to the tact and skill she displays in all her social relations would in any case make her a power in New York Society."

Her dinners, said *Town Topics,* did more to establish her leadership than anything else. "Such plate and crystal can be seen in no other house in New York. She has a gold service of

40 pieces and it would be simply impossible to estimate its value. Any one of the dinner plates is probably worth from $300 to $400. Then there are golden epergnes, candelabra and other articles both for ornament and use. The only other house in the city where there is a golden service is believed to be that of W. K. Vanderbilt. The floral decorations of Mrs. Astor's table consist invariably of gloire de Paris roses. Even the young men about town know these cost $1 apiece, and frequently there are 400 of them — an appropriate number — on the table. The dinner is always very long. The guests sit down at eight o'clock and seldom rise from the table before 11."

It is a remarkable fact that out of all the talk accompanying such eating not a single remark has been preserved for history, not an aphorism or anecdote. Society, observed Mrs. Chanler, would have fled in a body from contact with a poet, a painter, a musician, or a clever Frenchman.

The pattern of life at Newport was much like that on Fifth Avenue, except that the eating was more intensive. *Town Topics* painted an unappetizing picture:

"If Newport women are not the largest eaters in the world, they give a very good imitation in that direction, for they do nothing from one week's end to another but arrange themselves about boards that groan with delectable viands, where they open grateful mouths to everything that comes their way; and this they call social intercourse." It was a mode of living that "can only aid in rearing a fat-headed and thick-witted race of gourmands."

Mrs. Astor's year came to an early climax the third Monday of every January in New York's most celebrated social event — Mrs. Astor's ball. Fifth Avenue at Thirty-fourth Street at eleven o'clock is choked with elegant carriages discharging the cream of the cream of society into 350 Fifth Avenue. They enter the long side-hall set with bric-a-brac and statuary and overwhelmed with the odour of flowers, which are everywhere — on the chandeliers, on the statues, in the corners, on the tables. To the left is a reception room and the grand staircase, to the right three connecting parlours, one in garnet, the others in blue. The ladies and gentlemen disappear in order to arrange their toilets,

and emerge to be greeted by Mrs. Astor in white satin embroidered with pearls and silver, the bodice and train in green velvet. By her side are her three daughters.

Supper " by Pinard " is served in a great dining-room running the width of the house, in the rear of the hall and the parlours. The guests cluster around a huge table supported by several iron braces to withstand the weight of the beaten silver service and the dishes and ornaments that cover it. Behind and also running the width of the house is the art gallery, which is Mrs. Astor's ballroom. A marble Psyche dominates one end, a wondrous porcelain fireplace the other. Along the walls hung C. Troyon's sheep, Jules Breton's peasants, Jules Lefebvre's dream, Millet's geese, Van Marche's cattle piece, with scores of other paintings by the leading French artists of the time. The chandeliers and loose bric-a-brac are festooned with smilax vines and caught with huge clusters of roses. Mirrors are framed with dainty white and pink azaleas.

In the parlours are pyramids of tulips grounded around pine trees. The great hall is set with ferns, palms, and evergreens, the orchestra balcony with feathery asparagus flecked with orchids. Staircases and arched doorways are richly festooned with vines and flowers. Emphatically this is the Floral Age!

The men wear simple boutonnieres as favours. For ladies there are lace brooches, long pins for the hair in the shape of shepherds' crooks and swords, bracelets in plain bands, silver beads, and pendent medallions, all in silver, antique style.

Among the guests are Lionel Sackville West, the British Minister, and Miss West and Cornwallis West, M. de Strueve, the Russian Minister, Baron de Fava, the Italian Minister, the Prince of Pless, Count Harmoncourt, Attorney General and Mrs. Benjamin H. Brewster.

The german (music by Lander with two orchestras hidden in the balcony behind flowers) is danced at half past one. Lispenard Stewart, one of Mrs. Astor's favourite young men, leads with one of her daughters.

All of Mrs. Astor's balls follow this routine, but she may be wearing a black satin gown trimmed with roses, or red brocade, or purple velvet, and she will be standing beneath a grand por-

trait of herself by Carolus Duran, reproducing faithfully her triple necklace of diamonds, a fall of diamonds twelve rows deep from her corsage, a diamond stomacher, a tiara of diamonds on her wig, in which may be scattered diamond stars. For a change she may wear her famous Louis XIV diamonds. A corsage of orchids or roses gives the floral touch to this ensemble.

In earlier years at these grand affairs — more inclusive than the Patriarchs' — Mr. and Mrs. John Jacob Astor III and William Waldorf are notable guests, Mrs. Jonathan Edwards, the August Belmonts, the James Roosevelts, the C. O'D. Iselins, the James F. Ruggleses, Mrs. John Sherwood, Miss Hamilton J. Jay, the Robert Goelets, the Schuyler Hamiltons, Jr., T. Oakley Rhinelander, General and Mrs. Lloyd Aspinwall. Or the Elbridge T. Gerrys, the Cornelius Vanderbilts, the Elliott Roosevelts, Le Grand Cannon. Or General and Mrs. U. S. Grant, Chester A. Arthur, Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt, the Buchanan Winthrops, the Lydig Suydams, the De Lancey Kanes. Great names they all are and some of their bearers are so conscious of their fine descent that they carry the names of two families, and some even double their family name, like James Roosevelt Roosevelt, Mrs. Astor's son-in-law.

A few nights later Mrs. Astor is gracing the Patriarchs Ball, which starts at one o'clock in the morning after supper. There are other grand events that must be crowded into the season. The Charity Ball at the Metropolitan Opera House is a catch-all affair for the lesser ranks of society, where thirty-five hundred people gaze in awe at Mrs. Astor, clad in a gorgeous emerald-green velvet robe by Worth with silver floral embroidery set with rhinestones, sitting on a throne under a large gas-jet display which spells "Charity." At the Bachelors Ball her young relatives Matthew Astor Wilks, F. Augustus Schermerhorn, and Woodbury G. Langdon dance with young marriageables of other fashionable families among ten thousand dollars' worth of plants and flowers and eight orange trees bearing fruit. And there are of course the balls given in other splendid mansions along Fifth Avenue which Mrs. Astor must attend out of a feeling of *noblesse oblige*, and endless dinners where she must

always sit on the right hand of the host; and receptions in the afternoon where the personnel of society shifts kaleidoscopically, but remains always the same, with amazing novelties in food, favours, music, floral decorations, reproduced with a triumphant ingenuity that shows no essential change.

Merciful Lent intervenes to save society from its stomach, its nerves, and its boredom. Mrs. Astor may dash over to the Continent for the cure — much needed by now — and look in at Paris and London. After Easter she may stay in London for the season, or she may return to New York to scintillate briefly before going up to her husband's estate of Ferncliff to drink in the beauty of awakening spring. The first touch of warm weather will see Beechwood opened for her and the beginning of Newport's summer season — filled, too, with balls, dances, dinners, receptions, elaborate country picnics cunningly arranged by the ingenious McAllister and named by him *fêtes champêtres.*

At the first touch of coolish weather, Beechwood closes and 350 Fifth Avenue reopens. When Autumn paints the Hudson's landscape, she will retire to Ferncliff, there to entertain intimately the Dutchess County gentry. Then back to Fifth Avenue, where the season starts with small dinners for her own little circle, widens into receptions, and then, with the opening of the Opera, swings in its glittering crescendo toward the climax — once more — of Mrs. Astor's ball in January.

Such was Society, and such Mrs. Astor's peerless leadership. Crumbling old Knickerbocker ladies, living on modest rents which forbade their entrance into Society, treasured her occasional P.P.C. (leave-taking) cards at the end of a season (a gracious touch so typical of Mrs. Astor that it endeared her to hundreds). The newcoming rich, anxious to crash the gates, plotted and schemed and bribed their way (it was said that fifteen thousand dollars would get one an invitation to Mrs. Astor's ball) into the lowliest of the 350 Fifth Avenue affairs — an afternoon reception. In the absence of her husband, she relied on her favourites, the ever faithful Ward McAllister, who claimed to be her Creator, Harry Lehr, Lispenard Stewart, and Elisha Dyer, Jr. These young men jousted for her in many a social encounter, served as advance scouts in Belmont and Van-

derbilt enemy territory, sniffing rebellions in their infancy and sounding the alarm at serious challenges by competing hostesses.

Gracious and considerate with her loyal supporters, Mrs. Astor could be merciless as a tigress to those *grandes dames* inclined in a spirit of envy or jealousy to belittle her talents. A few months without an invitation usually served to conquer such *insurrectas;* failure to be included on that magic list of names for Mrs. Astor's annual ball meant that one no longer belonged to the Four Hundred — that legendary company of Society. This spelled ostracism, for had not the Lord Chamberlain, Ward McAllister himself, pronounced the verdict that Society consisted at most of no more than the four hundred who were invited to his Queen's ball?

CHAPTER *ii*

The Duel That Never Was Fought

UNFEELING people said Mrs. Astor was intent only on a vulgar display of her wealth as she sat, bejewelled, in the Diamond Horseshoe. They forgot that she was a mother, that she had four daughters and a son, plain of face and mind, who must be married off into the rank suitable to their exalted station in the American aristocracy.

Snares and pitfalls surrounded any Astor girl. Impostors and cruel deceivers lurked ever, in that Victorian age, seeking what they might ruin. Relatively poor but honest swains might communicate their love contagiously. Elopement already had twice left its stain on the Astor escutcheon. Then there was the peril of a true love marriage to the coachman: had not Mrs. Astor's own brother-in-law married a mere peasant girl in Dutchess County and been read out of the family, to become Henry the Forgotten?

Fortunately Mrs. Astor already had erected barriers against these dangers through the creation of the Four Hundred. It was among the scions of the Four Hundred that the Astor girls would find their mates, or among the provincial Four Hundreds of Boston, Philadelphia, or other cities possessing an authentic Society.

In creating the Patriarchs Ball, Mrs. Astor and her chamberlain had two objects in mind: the establishment of a definite hierarchy of the Twenty-five Families with its suborder of the One Hundred and Twenty-five holding their titles in fief to the Twenty-five; and the provision of a suitable setting for launching her daughters into life and society.

Emily, her eldest, was introduced in the season of 1874–5, and the following winter her engagement was announced to James J. Van Alen, of a distinguished old Knickerbocker family with land up at Kinderhook. His father, General James H. Van Alen, had commanded the Van Alen Cavalry during the war and had invested $300,000 happily in the Illinois Central.

Mrs. Astor was barely satisfied. The Van Alens had only a few millions, the old General had freed the Negroes in the Yorktown district he commanded, and the son was — of all things — a Democrat. While authentically Knickerbocker (the General's wife was a Schermerhorn), with roots in the Laurenses and the Connecticut Trumbulls, the Van Alens were second-order in both wealth and social standing.

William Astor was wroth. "Damned if I want my family mixed in with the Van Alens," quoth he, remembering the exquisite personality of the elder Van Alen, a widower and man about town, a venerable beau with a gardenia in his lapel and a deep bow for the ladies. Word got around to the doughty old warrior, who promptly challenged Astor to a duel.

This was more than Astor had counted on. He was distinctly not the person to risk his life over a Van Alen, but both gentlemen appointed seconds and these went into a huddle about the field of honour, the weapons, and other trappings of the feudal code. William himself consulted the code of honour and decided Van Alen had no right to satisfaction. Followed a series of fiery notes and protocols until Astor's second, eager for the fray but harried by his principal's hesitations, forced him into a retraction and then into a written apology to the General. Thus ended undramatically what had promised to be the last duel fought in New York.

Honour satisfied, the General advanced to consolidate his victory. The Founder of the family had indicated that $200,000 was a suitable dowry for his granddaughters, and William Backhouse had followed his father's wishes. But by 1875 the Astor wealth had increased enormously, and Emily was given a trust fund of $400,000.

On March 14, 1876 love triumphed and Emily was married by the Right Reverend Horatio Potter, Bishop of New York, as-

sisted by the inevitable Reverend Morgan Dix, rector of Trinity and chaplain to the family. The wedding in Grace Church and the reception at Mrs. Astor's were as splendid as she could contrive. William Astor, who had a vigorous distaste for Van Alens and splendid ceremonies, left for Florida that day after wishing his daughter happiness.

That happiness was to be shortlived, for she died in childbirth in 1881, leaving three children, Mary, James Laurens, and Sarah Steward. The General, who had developed a love for England, where gentlemen were given their due, took his grandchildren there to be put in school. Hearing that his son was ill in New York, he took passage for America, suffered a breakdown, and jumped over the side, fully dressed with high white hat, gloves, walking-stick, and all. His son inherited the residue of the estate, after $250,000 had been set aside for each of his two sisters, and became in his own right a millionaire.

The marriage of the second of Mrs. Astor's daughters, Helen Schermerhorn, was more to her taste. Helen's engagement to James Roosevelt Roosevelt caused a flutter in Society's dovecotes, for he carried in double measure one of the finest old names in the city. The Roosevelts were not enormously wealthy, but their forebears had been merchants and landowners. James Roosevelt, father of the bridegroom, was vice president and counsel of the Delaware & Hudson, a favourite investment of the old families. In 1854 he had bought an estate at Hyde Park and added to it until he had six hundred acres overlooking the stately Hudson. By his wife, Rebecca Howland (daughter of one of the proudest mercantile families), he had one son, now about to marry into the Astor family. After Rebecca's death he married Sarah Delano, and the son by this union was named Franklin Delano, in honour of that childless gentleman, a kinsman of the second Mrs. Roosevelt. This provided a double connection between the Astors and the Roosevelts, for Laura Astor, daughter of William Backhouse, was Franklin H. Delano's wife. Mrs. Astor could not know that her new son-in-law's half-brother one day would be a Democratic President. The thought would have given her a twinge. Much as she revered presidents, her devout Republicanism made her feel to-

ward Democrats about the way her devout Episcopalianism made her feel toward Baptists or atheists. True, being a Democrat was not a mortal sin if the man believed in sound money, but it indicated an unfortunate aberration whose consequences were unpredictable.

Helen brought a $400,000 trust fund to her marriage, which was solemnized at Grace Church November 18, 1878, with the Right Reverend Bishop Potter and the Reverend Messrs. Dix and Houghton officiating. The newly-weds moved into 372 Fifth Avenue, the house which the late William B. Astor had built for himself.

Young "Rosy" Roosevelt's Democracy turned into an unexpected asset when Cleveland triumphed. To Mrs. Astor the Democratic victory of 1884 proved that there was, after all, something to be said for her son-in-law's political leanings. For he had invested generously in Cleveland's war chest and was rewarded with the post of first secretary of the American legation in Vienna. To Vienna then went Mrs. Astor, to sweep through new triumphs bolstering her position as the Queen of American Society. Contacts with the Habsburgs were slight, but satisfying. The Vienna mission ended with Cleveland's defeat in 1888, but the glorious victory of 1892 was, in a sense, a personal triumph for Mrs. Astor, for her son-in-law was then named first secretary of the London Embassy.

But if "Rosy" Roosevelt was rewarded with London, why should not her other son-in-law, Van Alen, be likewise rewarded for his faithful Democracy and his $50,000 contribution to the war chest? He was. President Cleveland hastened to make him Ambassador to Italy, in which post he was to follow, fittingly enough, another member of the Astor family, William Waldorf. Come Republican, come Democratic President, it seemed that the Astors would be well connected diplomatically.

Republican mugwumps who had objected to William Waldorf's being rewarded by President Hayes for campaign contributions rose in rebellion against Cleveland's appointment of Roosevelt and Van Alen. The position of first secretary was regarded as a "career" job. Ambassadors might come and go, but first secretaries must remain to provide continuity. And

now Henry White, who had held the post for ten years, was displaced to make way for Roosevelt, who had given $10,000 to the campaign fund.

The Van Alen appointment was five times more outrageous, for he had given $50,000. E. L. Godkin, editor of the *Nation*, charged a deal in which Van Alen had given the money in exchange for the job. Van Alen asserted that the deal had been made after the election, not before, and that it was "merely the expression of a wish and a promise of assistance in carrying out my wishes." The mugwump editors of the *Century* and the *New York Evening Post* offered to raise $50,000 to reimburse Van Alen if he would relinquish his bill of sale.

Disillusioned Reform Republicans shook their heads sadly at Cleveland's entry into the "world of pure fashion" for diplomatic appointees. The President was informed that "it is not a parting of the ways. It is only a break in the fence through which you have strayed into the Capuan Meadows of Millionaireism."

The Senate, after bitter debate, ratified Van Alen's appointment. That gentleman, vindicated, acknowledged that many felt his appointment was improper and that their judgment "may be correct." He resigned and wrote the President: "Sincerely believing as I did that a continuation of Republican supremacy would be not only a hindrance to national progress but in time a positive menace to the success of popular government and having large interests at stake, I was impelled by both patriotic and selfish reasons to aid the Democratic cause." Cleveland urged him to reconsider: "We should not yield to noise and clamor." Van Alen refused.

A season in Rome with her daughter would have delighted Mrs. Astor; a season in London, operating from the vantage point of the American Embassy, even more. And that, apparently, she would not be denied, for young Roosevelt was already installed in England with his family. Mrs. Astor bundled off to the Motherland in the winter of 1893–4, but when she arrived, her daughter was dead at the Roosevelt country house at Heathfield, Ascot. She left an estate of $1,500,000 given by her indulgent father.

Roosevelt, hard pressed by the social standards of the court of St. James's, applied to the New York courts for an allowance from the trust fund of $30,000 a year for the maintenance of James Roosevelt Roosevelt, Jr., aged fourteen, and Helen Rebecca, twelve. The judge blew up. Such an allowance, he said, was unheard of. " It is difficult to conceive of any circumstances that would justify it. Such a sum is certainly out of the question under the present circumstances. . . . The income [from the trust funds] should not be dissipated merely to accustom these children to luxury. When they are of age they can do what they will with their own. In the meantime they should be taught the value of money and should be habituated to prudence and moderation rather than to extravagance in the gratification of every luxurious desire."

In granting $7,500 a year to each child, the judge said that " I deem this allowance an extreme exercise of discretion."

Mrs. Astor's third daughter, Charlotte Augusta, was named for her aunt, Mrs. John Jacob III, long before the family was cleft in twain. Her debut was one of the most brilliant ever held at 350 Fifth Avenue, but in the end she married James Coleman Drayton, whose recommendations consisted in South Carolina plantation-owner descent and membership in a distinguished Philadelphia family. He was not very wealthy, and the marriage was not highly regarded, as Drayton was inclined to bookishness. It was destined, however, to be the most spectacular of all the matches of Mrs. Astor's daughters.

So far it must be admitted that Mrs. Astor, for all her pains in creating the Patriarchs, the Junior Patriarchs, and the Assembly Balls and in carving out for herself the position of leader of Society, had not done too brilliantly in marrying off her daughters. True, she had no extraordinary material to work with, for her girls were hardly brilliant or beautiful, although pleasant enough in both appearance and personality.

The marriage of her youngest daughter, Caroline Schermerhorn, was unwittingly of her own doing. For had she not created the Family Circle Dancing Class, and did not Carrie there dance opposite handsome Orme Wilson, Jr.? It looked

like true love despite distractions intended to favour Harry Le Grand Cannon, a dashing fellow of much better family.

Neither of the Astors thought much of the Wilsons. Who indeed cared to dwell upon the fact that Richard Thornton Wilson had made a fortune selling cotton blankets at woollen prices to the Confederate armies and had become a prime cotton speculator at the end of the war? There was little claim of distinguished ancestry, and the recent fortune seemed hardly respectable — in any event certainly not dignified by two or three generations' possession. Nevertheless this man had come to New York with his war money, had continued speculating in cotton and horse-car franchises, had bought fallen Boss Tweed's Fifth Avenue mansion, and managed to marry off his daughters to the most glittering names in society. Ogden Goelet was to blame. He had made Mrs. Wilson the belle of the 1878 season and then had married her daughter. Another daughter would marry a British diplomat and a third would become Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt. Not that the Vanderbilts were pleased. In a rage Cornelius, Sr., cut off Junior with a mere million; later the impossible task of living on so little was relieved by his brother, who gave him back part of his patrimony. By the time the Wilsons had crashed the Vanderbilt portals, *Town Topics* remarked that there was nothing left but for Widower Wilson to marry Queen Victoria. Instead his son proceeded to marry into the Astors.

Mrs. Astor hid her disappointment and proceeded to make the wedding a stellar event of the 1884 calendar. The ceremony was held in the ebony-wainscoted art-gallery ballroom, under the eyes of the marble Water Nymph, of Samson and Delilah, the Ambulance Corps, the Moorish Bathers, the Halt in the Desert, the Wallachian Teamsters, and other chefs-d'œuvre by Cabanel, Detaille, Jules Breton, J. L. Jerome, Fromentin, Corot. The great gold chandelier and four golden candelabra lighted the gallery brilliantly. An aisle had been formed by rods covered with velvet, leading to the ebony fireplace. There was the prie-dieu, with a cluster of roses on it, where the bridal couple were to kneel. On either side of the fireplace were Roman pil-

lars ten feet high of the finest roses, topped by flowery capitals. The wainscoting was embellished with green foliage, white lilies, and orchids. Above the mantel was a veil of lilies of the valley, and maidenhair ferns covered the lower part of the fireplace. Palms screened the music balcony, over which hung clusters of callas and ascension lilies.

At three forty the bridal procession came down the grand staircase. Mrs. Astor and her favourite young man, Lispenard Stewart, led the way, behind them the bridegroom and Richard T. Wilson, Jr., and the inevitable Reverend Morgan Dix. Mr. Astor, home for the wedding, brought up the rear with his daughter. She was blonde, of slight figure, with a pretty face. They proceeded through aisles of ushers: Carrie's brother, John Jacob IV, Reginald W. Rives, Le Grand Cannon, Woodbury Kane, John Furnam, Hamilton Webster, Brockholst Cutting, all wearing scarf-pins of two diamonds and a ruby presented by the groom. The bridesmaids wore long veils of illusion caught with white ostrich tips and carried bouquets of roses, lilies of the valley tied with broad pink satin ribbons, and also fans of ivory and point lace, hand-painted — all gifts of the bride. On their shoulders were diamond bar lace pins in designs of flowers and birds, given by both bride and groom.

Mrs. Astor stood near the couple at the prie-dieu, wearing her diamond tiara, a diamond necklace, pendent diamond bracelets, and diamond pins in the form of a rose leaf and a butterfly. The wedding march ended, the Reverend Dr. Dix murmured, the knot was tied, and the couple passed down the aisle, pelted with rice by cheering ushers, to be congratulated by General Grant, General McClellan, William H. Vanderbilt, Mrs. William K. Vanderbilt, Levi P. Morton, W. C. Schermerhorn, and other notables. Her father settled his usual dowry on the bride — the income from a $400,000 trust fund, and a house at 414 Fifth Avenue, between Thirty-seventh and Thirty-eighth Streets, to match Mrs. Drayton's at 372 and Mrs. Roosevelt's at 374.

Among the wedding presents were:

Diamonds, from Mrs. Astor, the John Jacob Astors, the Wilsons, Mrs. Franklin H. Delano, General Van Alen.

From Richard T. Wilson, Sr., a double set of table cutlery in silver.

Winthrop Astor Chanler, silver basket; Mr. and Mrs. John Treat Irving, silver pitcher; Miss Langdon, silver perfumery bottle; Hamilton Fish Kean, silver candlestick; Woodbury Kane, silver dish; Robert Goelet, hammered gold and silver punch-bowl; the Ogden Goelets, silver repoussé service of five pieces; J. F. D. Lanier, glass smelling-bottle; the Karrick Riggses, fan of down; W. C. Schermerhorn, gold and china clock; Thomas Howard, smelling-bottle; Helen Beckwith, smelling-bottle; William M. Johnston, silver candlesticks; Mrs. James W. Paul, sofa cushion embroidered in gold; the E. N. Taylors, large bronze pitcher; Hamilton Carey, brass thermos; Henry Astor Carey, gold-lined punch-bowl; Elliott Roosevelt, china coffee cups; John Innes Kane, two bisque figures; Mrs. William Astor, silver candelabra; Arthur Astor Carey, silver pitcher; Mrs. William Iselin, antique jug in cream and gold porcelain.

Not forgetting the poor in this shower of gold and jewels, Mrs. Astor ordered a turkey and chicken dinner to be served at Bellevue Hospital, her custom when her daughters were married.

The grand lady had now only her son, John Jacob IV, to worry about. A slender, narrow-shouldered unimpressive lad, he was the first John Jacob to be known as Jack. Being twenty-three, he was introduced in 1887 to his peers at a reception for eight hundred guests. Irreverent *Town Topics* referred to him as "one of the richest catches of the day and at the same time voted so much less brilliant than his father that it is very questionable whether were he put to it, he could ever earn his bread by his brains." The judgment was less than fair. The fourth John Jacob was unable to earn his livelihood not by lack of intelligence but rather of training. Actually he was the first of the Astors to gain pleasure in the scientific spirit of the times. In his own laboratory he indulged in experiments. Being under no compulsion to be practical, these experiments had a naïve turn; the mark of a daydreamer was upon this shy, awkward, ungainly youth. He followed the traditional Astor path of indulging in a wanderjahr, which covered parts of Asia, Africa,

and South America, and returned to belie his reputation of being "as gentle as grocer's milk" by a fight at Sherry's with Beekman Kip Borrowe.

Town Topics commented: "There are a hundred young ladies in New York who hope to win for their own this young man of fathomless means, and each and every one of them would let down her hair and sob with the utmost diligence if she were to hear that his eye was roofed in or that court plaster spangled his damask cheek."

The tussle, unimportant in itself, was a premonition of a bitter turn of events that was to topple the proud Astor name, hitherto untouched by scandal.

A brawl, conducted with all the politeness of cultivated people, was on about that time in Philadelphia. Mrs. Willing, possessor of a beautiful and marriageable daughter, had cut the Assembly Ball by giving a supper of her own the same evening at which the William Waldorf Astors, Jack Astor, and Ward McAllister's sister were guests. The Vanderbilts and the Twomblys, down for the ball, went instead to the theatre, and Philadelphia society was torn to shreds in the recriminations which followed Mrs. Willing's disruption of the grand social affair merely to press her Ava upon the Astor attention.

Miss Willing was in New York soon after for the Patriarchs Ball. Its members, inured to the uncomfortable fact that Knickerbocker girls somehow did not run to beauty, were agasp to see this vision from Philadelphia float across the ballroom on Jack Astor's arm.

A frightful gossip ensued pro and con. The Willings, it was said, were really quite plebeian and Philadelphia society "loud-mouthed and brazen-faced." But genealogy seemed to establish that Ava Willing was a descendant of Alfred the Great, Henry I of France, and Henry I, Edward I, Henry III, and Henry IV of England through the Philadelphia Lloyds. Fine Pennsylvania families such as the Shippens, the Moores, the Bartons, and the Lowles had contributed to Ava's beauty, a Willing had been mayor, another had been a member of the Continental Congress, had voted, it was said, against the Declaration of Independence, and had served as president of the

first Bank of the United States. And a Willing had been among those Philadelphia merchants who protested against John Jacob Astor's mandarin hoax during Jefferson's Embargo.

Miss Willing was the toast of Newport in 1890. At an aquatic dinner given by Mrs. Willing, there had been a table-lake with night-blooming lilies, and waterfalls adorned by lotus flowers. A tiny water-lily was placed in every finger-bowl and Miss Willing was quoted: "We do not converse in Newport; we eat."

By the winter of 1890–1 Mrs. Astor was satisfied and the engagement was announced. Beauty wedded to the most aristocratic name in America was a newspaper story to stir the nation. The new Sunday supplements of the Hearst-Pulitzer school dilated over the splendours of the Astor fortune and the charm of Ava Lowle Willing.

"No two names in all the records of the aristocracy of the New World," wrote the *Herald* on the eve of the wedding, "are more spoken or toasted tonight than these. Rightly honored names are they, suggestive of courtesy, hospitality, benevolence, patriotism and intellectuality, well gilded names, moreover associated with bank accounts, silver chests and jewel cases. High comedy names, too, as have afforded a vast amount of speculation, gossip and entertainment to that portion of the community which we call Society."

Three trainloads of Astors, collaterals, and associated Four Hundredites boarded the cars in Jersey City, Mrs. Stephen Van Rensselaer Cruger distinguished herself in a dress of many colours, gold and crimson predominating in a broad plaid satin, topped by a great brown hat with an ostrich feather.

"New York," reported the *Times*, "practically took Philadelphia by storm today. Its Four Hundred invaded the fashionable quarter of the town and it capitulated. Not content with carrying off by the hand of its wealthiest marriageable son, John Jacob Astor, the greatest belle of the foremost family of the Quaker City, Miss Ava L. Willing, the wealth and fashion of New York came on, if not in immense numbers at least in such an influential way as to obliterate Philadelphia characteristics for the time being and give the fashionable heart of the city an air of gayety and animation entirely foreign to it."

Philadelphians "unaccustomed to the fine airs and graces of New York's Upper Tendom . . . stopped, stared and wondered." The Astors took over the Bellevue completely, and Jack and his mother reserved a suite of eighteen rooms at the Stratford.

At the wedding Ava, gowned by Worth in silver and orange, was the cynosure of all eyes. She wore a diamond lovers knot four inches high, the gift of her mother-in-law. Her veil fell from a tiara of huge diamonds given her by the groom. Mrs. Astor was splendid in rose and heliotrope satin flecked with rose petals.

"An ideal wedding," proclaimed the *Herald*, "in which there was never a hitch but only joy unbounded with wealth surrounded."

Jack's wedding was in a sense the culmination of Mrs. Astor's career, her greatest triumph. For she had guarded her boy against designing Manhattan mothers and intriguing young hussies, had indeed turned her back disdainfully on all of New York society to pick a daughter-in-law outside her own circle. Monarchs must find their mates in foreign lands to maintain their majesty and to underline the fact that they have no peers in their own domain. Just so Mrs. Astor had fared from Fifth Avenue to Broad Street, giving the Knickerbockracy the greatest snub in her reign. It was notable that her sister-in-law, Mrs. John Jacob III, had done exactly the same in marrying her son, William Waldorf, to another provincial beauty. The two heirs to the Astor Estate had thus been provided with Philadelphia mates, New York society had been put in its true place, and all America sat back to see what this infusion of beauty into the rather plain-featured Astor stock would produce in the way of future Astors.

But for Mrs. Astor the next few years were to be filled with sorrow. It was, of course, bound to happen sometime. Up to the year 1892 all the Astors had presented an irreproachable attitude toward the private moralities treasured of the Victorian age. The Astor women had been models of purity, and so pronounced in eulogies from the pulpit. As for the Astor men, they had been discreet.

And then came the shocking revelation. Some blamed England for it, and the pernicious custom of the American upper crust wintering in London, the modern Sodom where lords dallied with the wives and daughters of their peers. What, it was asked in pulpit and press, was going to happen to American womanhood if Society, which should be the mirror of morals, should itself become a sink of depravity.

A story so amazing that New York gasped and Society stood stock still in its dizzy whir was carried in the New York *Sun* of March 18, 1892, in an exclusive article running five columns on the front page, with appropriate art. An Astor woman had gone wrong! Her husband had challenged the dog, and if anyone doubted the story, here was the very correspondence on the proposed duel near Paris.

The woman was Charlotte Augusta Drayton, daughter of Mrs. Astor, who had stood so many times by the side of the leader of American society, receiving the élite of New York, Mrs. Drayton, the mother of four children, the youngest a babe barely out of arms. It couldn't be true! But there were the letters. How now could there be letters in the papers on the most sacred matter that could involve gentlemen? The cad, some snapped. Not satisfied with corrupting the daughter of Mrs. Astor, he had turned around and sold the very documents which alone incriminated her! It's a sorry world, sir, they said over whisky and soda at the Knickerbocker and Union Clubs that afternoon.

" Dog-like depravity," snarled Colonel Mann in *Town Topics*, gloating over his chance to even scores with Mrs. Astor. " Women who sin so miserably although of excellent origin . . . ductile wives . . . marital infidelity epidemic . . . streets overrun with husbands armed with cocked revolvers . . . the Drayton case shows a morbid condition in Society."

Who wronged James Coleman Drayton? None other than Hallett Alsop Borrowe, son of a vice president of Equitable Life, a prominent club-man whose very name was engraved on a tablet in Trinity.

The affair, splashed across the newspapers, became the nine days' wonder of 1892. What the public did not know was that

the Astors had worked heroically to hush up the dreadful mess. For appearance' sake Drayton and his wife had been packed off to Europe in the winter of 1891 to silence tongues already wagging. William Astor had given his daughter a choice: either cut out Borrowe or lose her $850,000 estate. Mrs. Astor was frantic.

But in January the villain appeared in London and met clandestinely with Mrs. Drayton. From his rooms at the St. James's Club, Piccadilly, the outraged husband wrote Borrowe offering to meet him in Paris to discuss certain matters. (Duelling was forbidden in England.) Borrowe answered from the Hotel Victoria that they had been in constant contact for several years. He was unaware of any subject for discussion.

Drayton replied: "You evidently perfectly understood why I wrote you. It is impossible to explain the subject in a letter or in England. I gave you your choice of behaving for once in your life like a gentleman and you did not choose to accept it. Do you or not care to meet me in Paris for matters impossible of settlement here? Yes or no? Your obedient servant, J. C. Drayton."

Borrowe replied to the "unsatisfactory but impertinent note which you courageously entrusted to an inoffensive boy commissionaire." He repudiated Drayton's right to a meeting, but would be at the Hotel Chatham in Paris the following week. "At your service there as I have already informed you that I am here, I am, sir, your obedient servant."

"Thank you. . . . Yours, with increased respect," Drayton responded.

Drayton took Edward Fox with him, Borrowe had Harry Vane Milbank, who had already killed two men. The seconds met with Ferdinand Boisacq and Francis Cherbouquet, authorities. No progress was made. A second meeting. It was proposed that the matter be referred to a court of honour. Borrowe accepted. The court reported:

"For reasons of a purely private nature, Mr. J. Coleman Drayton has demanded from Mr. H. A. Borrowe, a *réparation par les armes*. This reparation has been refused by the second of Mr. Borrowe, acting for him, for the following reasons: Ac-

cording to them, all the facts that have given rise to this affair do not give the right to Mr. J. Coleman Drayton to claim this reparation."

Drayton denounced the court of honour as Borrowe's subterfuge "to escape giving me the satisfaction to which I had an undoubted right. . . . He has inflicted on me the most grievous injury which one man can inflict upon another and the instant that I found him upon territory where satisfaction could be claimed without scandal and without legal restrictions, I sought it at his hands. I do not propose to enter upon a quibble. . . . I shall consider him a coward as well as a scoundrel and shall take pains to publish this opinion of him."

The facts, retorted Borrowe's seconds, had been laid before the two highest authorities in France, Aurélien Scholl and the Duc de Morny. They had decided "that too long a time had elapsed since the first cause of offense had been given and that coupled with the fact that the injured party had accepted and enjoyed an annual monetary consideration, debarred him from any reparation under the code of honor." Scholl added: "The meeting . . . should not take place under any circumstances whatsoever. . . . There is no longer any honor where there has been traffic, when honor has been conditionally sold. As to the taunts and insults of a man balked in his hope of gain, they are null, non-existent, without right and without importance." The Duc de Morny added: ". . . there remains nothing further for this person but to content himself with the contempt which his conduct has occasioned."

Thus sensation piled itself on sensation. Not only had an Astor name been dragged in the mire, but the family, it was said, had paid Drayton five thousand dollars a year to keep quiet. And Drayton had agreed!

"Rubbish . . . insane and idiotic in the extreme," commented friends of both the Astors and Drayton. He was independently wealthy; what could five thousand a year mean to him against his honour? "The insinuation that he has been acting the part of a mercenary coward for five years is ludicrous and silly." Faugh! said others. What Drayton needed was not a pistol, but a shotgun.

Mrs. Drayton was discovered in a little lodging-house off Piccadilly, her pale blue eyes swollen with weeping, her lustreless complexion white as chalk, her dark brown hair dishevelled. " If Coleman Drayton has chosen to make a fool of himself, it is his affair, not mine," said she.

Mrs. Astor hurried off across the ocean, stormed at her daughter, and then went to Algiers to recover. The mess was as bad as ever. The Draytons and Borrowe, it developed, lived within a " squirrel's scamper " of each other at Bernardsville, New Jersey, where there had been much gossip of the goings-on. It developed further that Drayton's second had sold the sacred court-of-honour correspondence to the *Sun* for five hundred dollars.

To many it seemed that the story of *un mari complaisant* was merely a blind behind which Borrowe could avoid a duel. Reporters roamed London, Paris, and America tracking down angles in this intriguing puzzle. Jack Astor hid himself up the Caloosahatchee River, Florida, a hundred miles from a telegraph. Mrs. Astor remained in Algiers. Drayton told the press: " I posted that fellow in Paris as a cur and now in the presence of you gentlemen I repeat that statement and call him again a cur and a coward." Borrowe denied criminal intimacy with Mrs. Drayton. " Mrs. Coleman Drayton," he told the press, " is a pure woman, I am sure. I have never wronged her."

But what was this in the *Tribune*? The outraged husband and the betrayer of his wife were on the same boat headed for America. The betrayer raced across England and the Irish Channel to catch the *Majestic* at Queenstown. What would happen now? Which one would kill the other?

But there was no answer from the *Majestic,* wrapped in pre-radio silence. The press speculated endlessly. Were the two men alive? Had Drayton shot down his rival like the cur he was? Had Borrowe raced to the ship in order to make a duelling ground of the *Majestic*? Would the captain tolerate such an attempt? Perhaps the two men even now were in the brig.

On the night of the *Majestic's* expected arrival, twenty-five reporters stood guard at quarantine while six steam tugs cruised the lower Bay and hundreds rowed out from the Brooklyn shore. The village at Fort Wadsworth was swamped.

The *Majestic* came up the bay and anchored. Reporters screamed from the tugs: "Are Drayton and Borrowe alive?" "Why, yes," came the rather surprised answer from the ship's rail. "What's the trouble?" The Duchess of Marlborough treated it as a huge joke. "Why, Mr. Drayton and I sat together at the captain's table."

Later the *Majestic* proceeded to her dock. Drayton was rushed to the Knickerbocker Club, where a policy of dignified silence was decided upon. Harry Milbank, Borrowe's second, met the press and declared Drayton must prove he received no money consideration. Later Borrowe himself told the press: "Drayton knows where I am to be found. He has not called me a coward to my face and I do not recognize his conversations with a third person, whom I may not know, as of any consequence to me."

The *World* covered half its front page with the "pictorial story of the voyage," showing, in many panels, the men bumping into each other on shipboard while avoiding a "meeting," but crying, as soon as they reached New York: "Let me at him." Boxing promoters were quoted as offering real money for a duel in the ring with gloves.

Gentlemen, wearied with the non-physical combat, advised a divorce, not a duel. But that, of course, was unthinkable for an Astor.

Then William Astor died in Paris and his will revealed that his erring daughter had been cut off and her $850,000 inheritance transferred to her children, who were under Drayton's care. But Mrs. Astor stood courageously by her daughter. Asked of her future plans, Charlotte herself sobbed: "We are left to mourn and comfort each other."

Mrs. Astor, who had taken the hardest way, was not one cut out for permanent mourning. After a period of decent grief over her late husband and her present daughter, Mrs. Astor returned to the social scene in 1894 with all colours flying. At a reception in Newport, Charlotte was by her side. But stand-off society, given the chance of its life to return all the snubs Mrs. Astor had dealt, sent its regrets. The spotless ladies would have nothing of Charlotte. Mrs. Astor persuaded her son, Jack,

now master of the fortune, to reinstate his sister in her inheritance, but Drayton retained custody of the children, Caroline Astor, twelve, Henry Coleman, nine, William Astor, five, and Alida Livingston, two.

As for young Borrowe, infuriated by the betrayal of the court-of-honour correspondence, he dashed back to Europe to fight a duel in Brussels with the cad. It was not his first, for he sported a flattened bullet in his stickpin, extracted from his knee.

After the duel he drew on his father for £450, but that gentleman, wearied of Delmonico brawls and Astor notoriety, packed him off to Newark, where the street-car company reformed him. Years later *Harper's Weekly* published a poem of his that seemed to indicate that he had grown philosophic about society and its golden baubles:

> Money that you cried for, and lied for, and died for,
> Money that you died for, yet could not take away.
> On your coffin lid the rattle
> Of the gravel calls to battle,
> And your heirs-at-law are off to start the fray.

The celebrated *affaire* having proved impossible of settlement on the field of honour, Charlotte filed suit for custody of her children, Drayton counter-filed with suit for divorce in New Jersey, Charlotte counter-filed with suit for divorce. Directing Astorian strategy was Joseph H. Choate, who noted genially: "Now all I am to do is to get Mrs. Drayton and the Astors out of the way." There were two objectives: to shroud the case from public view, and to wear Drayton down. Drayton's attorney ridiculed such a possibility: "The Court of Chancery in this state is unsullied and above suspicion. The people of New York and New Jersey are evidently anxiously waiting to see justice meted out in a case surrounded by wealth and influence."

Years after the celebrated duel that never was fought, Charlotte was granted her divorce on the grounds of desertion arising from "cruel suspicions as to her marital fidelity." Thus her honour was legally salvaged and finis written to what the *Herald*

called "as pretty a social disturbance as ever agitated New York Society."

The fine old High-Church sensibilities of the New York Knickerbockracy were shocked to the core by the spectacle of an Astor divorce. And this despite Colonel Henry Watterson's judgment that "you couldn't throw a brick into the Four Hundred without hitting either an injured husband, a recreant wife — or at least — a gilded nincompoop." Sin should be expiated by a lifetime of repentance and celibacy. After all, an erring woman could become a deaconess and spend her life ministering to the poor. Instead Charlotte elected to escape.

For Colonel William D'Alton Mann, publisher of *Town Topics,* the most polite and skilful blackmailer of his time, the day had come for his revenge upon Mrs. Astor.

"One may fairly be curious to learn," he wrote, "what sort of moral aid would be offered a young woman requesting it by a mother that had devoted a lifetime to dinner-giving, a brother whose mind had evolved a machine for blowing dust off roadways, and a father that came home once a year. . . . The Astors are rich, have been rich for a number of years. Nothing else can be said of them. They are not aristocratic in any sense of the word, not by reason of ancestry, mental equipment or dignity of living. They are not representative Americans or representative of anything. In considering the misfortunes of Mrs. Drayton, it is best to forget that she is an Astor and to merely pity her as a woman that needs at this juncture more solace and wider absolution than she is likely to get."

Colonel Mann's *Town Topics,* which contained so many unpleasant truths about those who refused to pay, was hardly correct in questioning the Astors' aristocracy. If there was any aristocracy in America, the Astors were it. They were the mirror of fashion, and if divorce was tolerable in their family, there was little need for others to be too priggish about it. Divorce, which had been unthinkable among the better families, became in the 1890's a daring venture which did not close the doors of Society to the experimenters. If in the 1880's Mrs. Astor crossed out the name of Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont, formerly Mrs. Vanderbilt,

in the 1890's she was obliged to admit that in some cases — as in her daughter's — divorce was legitimate. Thus did ancient taboos crumble. Before Mrs. Astor shuffled off this mortal coil, divorce would be regarded as a regrettable but permissible way of solving marital errors.

CHAPTER *iii*

Gilded Age

THE WILLIAM ASTOR who died in Paris during his daughter's disgrace was said to have been " the worst of the Astors," in distinction from his brother John Jacob III, " the best of the Astors." Such judgments were a matter of taste. There were those who admired him for throwing off the bonds of routine that had fettered all preceding Astors, for rebelling against his wife's endless round of social formalities, for living his own life as he pleased to live it.

The day of his father's death in 1875 was a day of liberation. Dutifully he had gone through the routine of the Astor Estate, and had even dabbled in business a bit himself, financing the Westchester Gas Light Company serving industries and inhabitants on Astor lands in the Bronx. His holdings in Delaware & Hudson and other Astor stocks ran well up in the millions. But after 1875 he did not bother much with them. Proxies were sent to Le Grand Cannon or to others; his share of the estate was entrusted to Philip Kissam as agent.

William was by no means a dullard. He had graduated near the head of his class at Columbia and then had travelled in the Near East, going farther up the Nile than any mere tourist had ever ventured, questing mildly in Palestine, Turkey, and Greece, and indulging in the fashionable sport of musing among excavations over departed civilizations.

After his marriage to Caroline Schermerhorn in 1853 he bought lands near Rhinebeck, which once had been part of the Kip farm on Beekman's patent, where he developed his famous

estate, Ferncliff. In a sense Ferncliff was an escape from 350 Fifth Avenue. His wife loved Society, he horses. She loathed horses, he Society. And when he was bored with horses and Ferncliff, there was the *Ambassadress*, the biggest yacht afloat. He disliked hotels and lived on the *Ambassadress* the winters through in Florida. Fortunately Mrs. Astor loathed both yachts and Florida.

The Governor of Florida was flattered to have an Astor as a guest in a state as yet frequented in winter mainly by gouty old gentlemen and semi-invalided old ladies seeking peace and quiet among the sunshine and palm trees. Overcoming Confederate prejudices, he invited Astor to join his military staff and to provide funds for a gun squad to scour the Everglades for hostile Seminoles. Astor bought a business block in Jacksonville, opened a railroad from St. Augustine to Palatka, and was honoured in the naming of Lake Schermerhorn and the towns of Astor and Armstrong. The state gave him a grant of eighty thousand acres for development in gratitude for his patronage and would, it was said, have named him senator if he had had the slightest wish for such honours.

In springtime Astor was back at Ferncliff, whose twelve hundred acres were being developed into park and farms with racing stables, cattle barns, conservatories, and coachhouse — all in all a splendid property with tree-lined avenues adorned by iron statuary and cement urns leading to the manor house, an ornate Italian-style structure with a fine view of the Hudson.

As age crept over him, Astor abandoned the sailing vessel *Ambassadress* for a steam yacht, 240 feet long, which he named the *Nourmahal* — the first of a series of *Nourmahals*.

Weird anecdotes filtered into New York concerning his sojourns in Florida, in Paris, in the wilds of Minnesota, where he was reputedly "a one-man temperance society dedicated to destroying all spirituous liquor even if he had to drink it all himself." But whatever his private life, he led it in a decent seclusion, without public offence or scandal.

Nevertheless in 1891 he was actually seen in New York at the New York Club (he had long since dropped the Union and the Knickerbocker) and at the Horse Show in company with

Mrs. Astor. She gave a series of dinners in his honour, " introducing " him as it were, to society. When he sailed for Europe she was pictured " with a trail of tears from the steamer deck to the pier."

The only public attention which Astor ever received arose from the Treasury Department's charges that he and Mrs. Astor smuggled in Paris clothing. It was the Astor contention that their trunks should be passed without inspection because they contained only duty-free clothing. Mrs. Astor was furious when customs men insisted on pawing through her acquisitions, and frugal Mr. Astor was irate when $1,800 was assessed in duties. The customs men intimated that Mrs. Astor, armed with such a formidable quantity of Paris gowns, never meant to patronize a New York couturière again. She responded that on the contrary she had bought fewer clothes than usual. The lower-court ruling that goods bought for future use and not worn are dutiable was contested up to the Supreme Court which held that if those buying abroad " obtain a pecuniary advantage over citizens who remain at home, that is but an incidental advantage attendant on the opportunity to go abroad." The decision soothed the Astors, for it was held that clothing suitable to the season immediately approaching, and in quantities ordinarily used, was admissable duty-free.

The customs men, however, hawk-like, continued to watch the Astors. In 1891 a downtown auction room was crowded for the well-advertised sale of Mrs. Astor's gowns, seized for undervaluation. The first gown to be knocked down, an embroidered green silk and velvet robe made by Felix, excited bids starting at $100 and climbing to $500 in a duel between Bloomingdale Brothers and Bial's Music Hall. On a blue silk robe, the corsage ornamented in passementerie, bidding started at $400 and ended when a concert hall won it for Jennie Joyce for $770.

William Astor died in Paris on April 25, 1892, of heart failure, congestion in the lungs, and the rupture of an aneurism (arterial tumour). The funeral was held in the American Episcopal Church with the widow, two daughters, and three friends present. The American funeral was held in Trinity Chapel and only three carriages followed the hearse to Trinity Cemetery.

Astor departed as he had lived — a man not of this world. He had detached reality from himself as neatly as a silk hat laid away on a shelf. His own existence was translated to a plane completely divorced from tenement houses, politics, charity, society. In a way it was a triumph of the ideal over the real. Almost literally he made his own environment and then proceeded to live in it, insulated from the affairs of mankind.

It took fifteen thousand words on fifty-six pages to divide his holdings. The soiled, crumpled document provided estates of $1,250,000 for Helen Roosevelt and Caroline Wilson, set up trusts of $466,667 for each of deceased Emily Van Alen's three children, and deprived Charlotte Drayton of trust funds and her Fifth Avenue house, of everything save her $400,000 ante-nuptial trust.

Mrs. Astor, in addition to her ante-nuptial trust of some $200,000, received the life use of the Fifth Avenue and Newport properties and a $50,000 annuity — a rather meagre share, some thought, in an estate valued at $30,000,000 to $50,000,000. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Astor and her daughters came off with some $6,000,000. The rest went to John Jacob IV, a young man of twenty-eight.

William Astor continued the device originated by the Founder: the property William had inherited in trust from his father, William Backhouse, was given to John Jacob IV in fee simple, as his own. The other half of the estate, over which William had had absolute control, went to his son in trust, one half of the income his immediately, the other half when he reached thirty. Thus was the principle of primogeniture prolonged another generation. As Charlotte explained it: "My father was a proud man and his object was to keep the money in the family. To speak more correctly I should say that he wants the money to go from father to son for generations until the family is the richest in the country."

William left $145,000 to charity. The Exempt Firemen's Fund got $10,000; the Society for the Relief of Aged Respectable Indigent Females, $15,000; Trinity's poor, $10,000; the Woman's Hospital, $10,000; the New York Missionary and Tract Society,

$25,000; the Home for Incurables, $10,000; St. Luke's Hospital, in Jacksonville, $15,000; the Astor Library, $50,000. That was one-third of one per cent of his fortune — the least any Astor so far had felt it necessary to give to the Lord.

Detesting his brother Henry's misalliance, he stipulated carefully that neither Henry nor his issue were to benefit under the will in any way; however, if by some chance it was held that Henry had anything due him, that sum should be given to the Astor Library. His daughters' estates were free from their husbands' interference, and were to be willed only to their children. If any had no children, her estate was to be divided among brother and sisters and their issue.

The newspapers paid little attention to Astor's departure from this life or to his will. Little was expected and so no one was disappointed. But *Town Topics* sneered at "one of the meanest testamentary documents ever drawn" as evidence of Astor's "utter, uncompromising selfishness." The bequests to charity were "casual and unimportant. If an Astor were to be reminded that he owes something to the community, he would immediately have a bilious attack and order a curtailment of house expenditures. As for utilizing any portion of his fortune to improve the intellectual or artistic status of his fellow-countrymen, that would be an eccentricity in an Astor that would move the remainder of the family to put him into seclusion."

If the last shaft seemed too barbed, one had only to wait for a few years to see an Astor collateral confined in Bloomingdale asylum in order to conserve his fortune.

The failure of Astor to revive the anæmic Astor Library by a generous injection of cash doomed that institution. His grandfather had given $400,000, he only $50,000 and that was the last to be given by any Astor. Even the loyal *Tribune* became petulant over Astor neglect of their only outstanding benefaction: "The Astor Library has an old reputation for churlishness and indifference . . . attitude stiff and formal . . . the visitor made to feel his place as an interloper and intruder . . . refuge for a few supercilious officials and a few ornamental trus-

tees." "New administration and new methods are always possible," the *Tribune* observed, "even in LaFayette Place where they have not hitherto been much looked for."

But what could be expected of a research and reference library whose 1894 income was $47,000? It could not even keep open at night; there was no money for attendants or lights.

William Astor's $50,000 meant that there was no longer any hope that the Astor family would keep up its library. So in 1895 the trustees of the Astor, Tilden, and Lenox Libraries agreed to pool their resources in the New York Public Library, of which the Astor was to be the reference division. In 1901 the free circulating libraries, sustained by the city, came in. Andrew Carnegie, ex-ironmonger, gave $5,200,000 to build city-wide branches, and work was started on the main building at Fifth Avenue and Forty-second street, site of the old Croton Reservoir. The old Astor continued to serve as New York's main reference centre until 1911, when the new building was completed. The old structure still stands on LaFayette Street, a reminder of the days when that was a quiet, aristocratic enclave only a few blocks long between roaring Broadway and the bustling Bowery. Today the building is occupied by the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society. In halls where the savants of the 1850's browsed over the most complete collection of books in the United States, social workers now listen to tales of woe told in a tongue that would have astonished old Joseph Green Cogswell, who probably knew Hebrew, but certainly not Yiddish. In one corner there is still a collection of books and papers — the Central Jewish Library and Archives.

Her husband's death drew mercifully over Mrs. Astor the mourning weeds which permitted graceful retirement from social functions. Otherwise her position would have been most awkward, what with the Drayton scandal clouding the family name and subjecting her to withering rebuffs from holier-than-thou society matrons. The death in England late in 1893 of her daughter Helen Schermerhorn Roosevelt prolonged her mourning, giving a decent respite for the Queen of the Four Hundred to plan a fight for rehabilitation. If for several years Mrs. Astor had to forswear those annual balls on the third Monday in Janu-

ary which marked her supremacy, the wound was not too deep. The panic of 1893 having intervened, society, out of a decent respect for the opinion of others, lessened somewhat its feverish display of wealth and craving for social entertainment. Many of the Four Hundred closed their town houses and took apartments in London, Paris, or the south of France, waiting for the economic storm to blow over. But while others were frightened by the "anarchist scare" which accompanied the panic and saw, in their mind's eye, bombs being hurled through plate-glass windows, Mrs. Astor was plotting the grand strategic move which would steady her swaying throne and rally her wandering vassals.

That coup was nothing less than to plant on the pavement of Fifth Avenue a French château, copied faithfully by that prince of architects, Richard M. Hunt, from originals standing on the banks of the Loire. Already he had built other French châteaux and Italian palazzos along the Avenue and in Newport for those American Renaissance princes, W. K. Vanderbilt, Elbridge T. Gerry, Ogden Goelet, Cornelius Vanderbilt, and O. H. P. Belmont. Some complained that Hunt's copies merely combined sterility of imagination with inordinate wealth, but to him it seemed appropriate that New World seigneurs and magnificoes should live in the style of their Old World prototypes. In any event he could boast that he was replacing the formlessness of American carpenter-and-mason architecture with the best examples of the Parisian ateliers.

William Waldorf, her obstreperous nephew, was responsible for Mrs. Astor's march up the Avenue for a new home. From England he had decreed that the grandest hotel in America must arise on the site of his father's house at Thirty-third Street, and that it must bear the name of "Waldorf." Whatever Americans might think of their wealthiest expatriate, he had contrived that his name must be on everyone's lips, and that it must stand for the last word in magnificence.

Naturally Mrs. Astor could not be expected to live next door to a hotel. Already Fifth Avenue below Murray Hill was becoming somewhat commercial. What extraordinary changes the *grande dame* had seen on that street! When she was a girl,

the wealth and fashion of the town gathered at its lower end, around Washington Square. She herself, in the 1850's, had decreed that fashion must move up to the Thirties. And in the 1880's the Vanderbilts had pushed the frontier of splendour another mile up the Avenue into the Fifties below Central Park.

A further mile up the Avenue, at Sixty-fifth Street, the great double residence to be occupied by Mrs. Astor and by her son and daughter-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. John Jacob Astor IV, became the focus of all eyes — both of society and of the plebs. Rubberneck wagons that had paused at Thirty-fourth to hear of the glories enclosed within the rather drab four-story brownstone at 350 Fifth Avenue paused again at Sixty-fifth Street to detail the splendours of number 840. Tourists speculated on whether Mrs. Astor would have golden doorknobs inset with diamonds. A confidence man sold the mansion to a young German for five hundred dollars.

Richard M. Hunt's creation was put on display February 1, 1896. A thousand of the élite came to wonder at the marvel achieved by the wedding of the architect's genius and the Astor fortune in the immaculate gold and white ballroom and the gorgeous ebony and gold dining-room.

Two days later Mrs. Astor gave her annual ball, the first since 1890. The most beautiful cotillions in twenty years, sighed old New Yorkers, while the youngsters looked in hushed awe at Hunt's use of colour and form to provide Mrs. Astor with the regal setting she needed. Even Mrs. Astor seemed to have been sobered by the magnificence of it all, for she deserted the purple velvets of yesteryear to appear in a gown of palest grey satin trimmed with embroidery and lace.

The elegants roamed through the structure, admiring the Jack Astors' dining-room to the right of the stairway, the reception room to the left, the grand staircase that led to the bedrooms. Each room exemplified a period, done painstakingly. The reception room, embellished rococo in white and gilt, was filled with knick-knacks and boasted a peacock-tail rug. The furniture, copied from the Petit Trianon, was smuggled in, the furniture workers' union complained, but the furnishers pooh-poohed such an ugly rumour.

In the art-gallery ballroom running the entire width of the house hung pictures that had cost the Astors $276,000 and were valued at double that figure. They averaged $3,867.90 a picture, but some were appraised as high as $40,000.

The thought weighed heavily on some that 840 Fifth Avenue was more museum than mansion, with Mrs. Astor as the chief exhibit. Her grand ballroom seemed filled with echoes of the past, of an age dead, of customs and manners outdated. The years between 1890 and 1896, when Mrs. Astor had not reigned actively, may have marked off two eras, the post-war from that of the new throbbing twentieth century aborning. The new élite would not centre their interests on the sacred rites of the table and the studied elegancies of the cotillion and quadrille nor would they be content in the tight little formal world bounded by Fifth Avenue, the Opera, and Newport. As they scattered their interests and divested themselves of the old formalities, the younger set would need no queen creating hierarchies and setting bounds.

Not that they would lead a rebellion against Mrs. Astor. If she wished to reign as a kind of dowager queen, regarded with a mixture of awe and indifference, of veneration and amazement, nobody cared enough to challenge her. Society still crooked its knee respectfully before this lady of sixty-five. When Consuelo Vanderbilt united the aristocracy of two worlds by becoming the Duchess of Marlborough at a Fifth Avenue church, Mrs. Astor had the position of honour in the procession up the aisle directly behind the British Ambassador, and at the wedding breakfast she sat at the head table with Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt, Ambassador Pauncefote, Governor and Mrs. Morton, and Bishop Littlejohn. No social affair amounted to much which did not carry Mrs. Astor's benediction, and her annual ball was still the sight of the season.

With Mrs. Astor's old house at Thirty-fourth Street also passed Ward McAllister, her devoted chamberlain, he who had called his queen his "mystic Rose." Buried by pallbearers C. M. Depew, Cornelius Vanderbilt, and De Lancey Astor Kane, he had outlived his time. Not that his fertile mind was exhausted of stratagems, but that he had committed an unpardonable sin

— he had written a book, in all seriousness, about Society. Unfortunately the populace considered *Society as I Found It* a hilarious satire, and the Four Hundred writhed.

McAllister was succeeded in Mrs. Astor's graces by Harry Lehr, of the treble voice and the mincing manners. Harry sold champagne for George Kessler and was angling for an heiress. Just what Mrs. Astor saw in this curious specimen of the male sex was hard for some to understand; his bride discovered on her wedding night that he was interested exclusively in money. What with dinners at which dogs were served pâté de foie gras and chicken, Harry brought society's extravagance to its grand finale in the Bradley-Martin fancy-dress ball at the Waldorf in 1897, after which the Martins fled America to escape ridicule and vindictive tax-gatherers.

It was a hard, arrogant Gilded Age, that of the "Gay Nineties" — glittering in ostentation, formal in its virtues, obeisant to birth and blood, to lineage comfortably cushioned by wealth, abysmally ignorant and unheeding. The Four Hundred believed their fortunes rested on eternal values, and bothered not to look beneath the surface.

Certainly Mrs. Astor didn't. It is doubtful if she had ever seen one of the tenements from which she drew the nourishment for her magnificent balls. She was a kindly woman toward those she knew; but the slums she knew not. Whatever compassion there was in her soul was discharged fully by sponsoring the annual Charity Ball, her annual dinner for newsboys, and other favourite philanthropies.

Not all the censure could be heaped on Mrs. Astor's head. Since the draft riots of 1863 the slum-dwellers had only once really expressed their discontent impressively, during the Henry George mayoralty campaign of 1886. "It is this apparent philosophic acceptance of indecent conditions," commented a Tenement House Commissioner a generation later, "which has led the ruling class to excuse and accept these conditions on the grounds that the people enduring them were perfectly happy. In other words, because they do not revolt or go on the rampage as a result of these conditions, they must be perfectly contented under them."

If tenants did not riot in the streets, they must be happy. If they were happy, then certainly Mrs. Astor had no reason to object, and all was well with a world that was never more self-satisfied in its upper reaches than in the late Victorian era in which she flourished.

In any event she could say that she hardly ranked with the multimillionaires. Her husband had left her only a modest $50,000 annuity along with an old-fashioned house and a Newport "cottage." Her marriage settlement had been nursed along until it amounted to nearly $250,000, but her magnificent new home at 840 Fifth Avenue she owed entirely to her son. Even he tried to snatch away surplus funds which had accumulated from her annuity. Trustees of the estate had set aside securities to produce $50,000 a year, but such was the abundance of America's prosperity that $165,000 had accumulated over and above the annual payment. Her attorneys fought hard for her right to keep the excess, but Jack's counsel sternly insisted on "opposing a senseless and illegal accumulation of income of a fund which has always paid and continues to pay his mother's annual income in full."

The heat developed by clashing lawyers perhaps did not reflect any actual hard feelings between Jack and his mother, but there was no mistaking the shrewish tongue of her granddaughter, Mary Van Alen, who was saying that the nuptials of Mrs. Astor and Harry Lehr would soon be announced. In the season of 1900–1 Harry had taken shelter under her roof, for after all he was a poor young man dependent on selling wines and liquors to the Four Hundred for his living. He promptly left Mrs. Astor's home to take up bachelor quarters. More serious was the canard in Paris newspapers of her impending marriage to Dr. Alexander Clarke. Mrs. Astor had bought a house in avenue d'Iéna, it was said, as a home. The poor old lady was upset quite as much by that as by the misadventure in the previous Paris season when invitation cards were sent out mysteriously in her name to four hundred prominent personages in Paris society, including Cabinet ministers and ambassadors.

These happenings underlined the growing frivolity of the times, the lack of awe and respect for such fine ladies. Scenes

of sacrilege were enacted even at her own balls, although fortunately not in her presence, for she was wont to retire earlier as age crept upon her. But matches were struck on her gold and white walls, tapestries were burned with cigarette butts, and young men flirted with the ladies' maids and fell asleep under the tables. New times, new customs; and strange ones, too, for Mrs. Astor. All the more reason, then, for the older set in society to huddle together under her leadership, to accept eagerly her invitations to grand affairs at 840 Fifth Avenue, where favours became, if possible, more gaudy than ever: gilded coronet wands trimmed with hyacinthe roses, Indian-work baskets of sweet grass trimmed with ribbons, fancy pincushions, grotesque heads for inkstands, silver sealing sets.

Typical of the times was the thought that perhaps Mrs. Astor might be interviewed. Neither Mrs. Astor nor any other self-respecting member of the Four Hundred would dream, of course, of submitting to an interview by reporters from the "gutter press"; as for the dignified press, its editors would not think of humiliating lofty personages by impertinent inquiries. Nixola Greeley-Smith, granddaughter of Horace Greeley and reporter for the *World*, rushed in where angels feared to tread, armed with an introduction from Chauncey M. Depew, who probably smiled to himself as he wrote the note.

Nixola opened her interview by comparing Mrs. Astor's role to that of Queen Victoria and the Empress Eugénie. The grand lady mellowed and confided: "I am not vain enough to think New York cannot get along without me." But when Nixola went back with her story to get Mrs. Astor's O. K., the maid returned with Madame's regrets and two dollars. "Mrs. Astor sends you this because she knows that you work for a living and that you have been put to some trouble coming here," the maid explained.

"Will you," asked Horace Greeley's granddaughter, "deliver a message exactly as I give it to you? Tell Mrs. Astor that she not only forgets who I am, but she forgets who she is. Give her back the two dollars with my compliments and tell her that when John Jacob Astor was skinning rabbits my grandfather was getting out the *Tribune* and was one of the foremost citizens of New York."

In 1898 Mrs. Astor for the first time recognized the existence of Chicago (a city she had never seen) by giving a dinner for Mrs. Potter Palmer, an acknowledgment that "the time had come" for the Gold Coast as it had a decade earlier for Mrs. Vanderbilt. The next summer she entertained the Count of Turin in Newport. Baron Oppenheim, nephew of the Rothschilds, was her prize in 1899. That in itself showed a certain softening in the old lady, for the Baron was Jewish by birth and Catholic by choice and variously described as a banker, a millionaire, an impostor, and a humbug. War developed between the Baron and Harry Lehr, the Baron complaining bitterly to Harry's French wine company and he retaliating by paying court to the heiress the Baron was wooing. By that time high society's antics were exciting popular wrath and providing Socialists with armfuls of ammunition. Mrs. Astor herself did not allay criticism by heading the list of patronesses for the benefit ball at the Metropolitan to help the British soldiers fighting the Boers. The Irish press fumed and even a good many of old native stock marvelled that a lady who prided herself so much on her old Dutch Schermerhorn blood should have lent her name against the South African Dutch.

Mrs. Astor greeted the twentieth century in her ball of 1901, appearing in black velvet encrusted with silver, blazing in all her diamonds. Her mansion was transformed into an Italian garden, and flowers came back into their old favour with American Beauties — her favourite rose — heaped everywhere. The *Times* acknowledged that she "has continued to wield the only scepter possible in a democratic country — that of womanly kindliness, refinement, discretion and tact."

At the 1902 ball the favours were more extravagant than ever: fancy leather photo frames, satin bags, rose ruffs, floral hoops, paperweights, pipes, scarf bags, directoire wands trimmed with chiffon. All the fine names of society were represented: Charles Astor Bristed, Cooper Hewitt, Whitelaw Reid, Ogden Mills, Lewis Stuyvesant Chanler, Goelet Gallatin, Winthrop Rutherfurd, Schuyler Schieffelin, Bradish Johnson, Egerton Winthrop, Lispenard Stewart, Stuyvesant Fish.

That summer she opened her new ballroom at Beechwood,

the largest in Newport, decorated in white and gold in Louis XV style with endless mirrors and the Duchess of Marlborough.

At her 1903 ball Mrs. Astor received standing under her portrait, the only authorized one, done by Carolus Duran. Eyes shifted from the portrait to the veritable Mrs. Astor, gorgeous in emerald-green velvet trimmed with sable, her elbow-length sleeves covered with beautiful old lace tinted with deep ecru, her upper half covered with diamonds — innumerable diamond brooches on her bodice, diamond necklaces hanging in series from neck to bosom and filling in the space between her collar of diamonds and her diamond stomacher, the whole topped by a flashing diamond tiara.

Neither Mrs. Astor nor the distinguished guests at her annual ball in 1905 could know then that they were attending the last of the historic fêtes which had climaxed the season for the past thirty years. Mrs. Astor herself seemed worn, her wrinkles and chins defying the most expert attention. For the last time she stood under Duran's famous portrait, clad in a superb Marie Antoinette gown of deepest purple velvet trimmed with pale blue satin and embroidered with gold paillettes, looking every inch a dowager queen, greeting her subjects as they passed before her.

Rarer after that became her dinners, those sumptuous affairs distinguished by filet de bœuf aux champignons farcis, terrapin soup (always served from the Union Club kitchen), canvasback duck (Lord Rosebery said that bird and not the eagle should have been the American emblem), and pâté de foie gras.

Before the sun set she was to give one more famous banquet to Prince Louis of Battenberg. She decided that seventy persons was the maximum she cared to seat, and no Vanderbilts were invited. The seventy passed into a more select category than the Four Hundred and were known as "Mrs. Astor's elect."

Her horror of overt publicity grew more intense. Particularly she lived in terror of a chance photographer. Driving in the Park, she wore a heavy veil and carried a small parasol. Before her carriage emerged, a footman had scouted the driveway.

She would not go near the Fifth Avenue windows of her home for fear of being seen from the rubberneck wagons.

The ball of 1906 could not be held because she had stumbled on her marble stairs and fallen. The next autumn she was under the care of her physician, two nurses, three maids, and a butler at Beechwood. Arriving at Grand Central in her special car, she was moved in a wheel chair to her carriage.

Her illness was not fatal, but the remarkable spirit that had dominated society for thirty years was broken. Indeed, it must have been a lonely and regretful old age for her, fraught with many a cruel memory. Gone were the friends of her youth, gone most of those renowned personages who had adorned her ballroom at the apex of her rule in the 1880's. Long since dead was her husband, and of him there must be bitter thoughts for happiness thwarted and hopes cheated. Dead were two of her four daughters; a third lived in exile while her mother strove to forget the horrid scandal that had touched the name of Astor. Fortunately gossip dwelt lightly, as yet, on the diverging paths of her son and Mrs. John Jacob IV.

No longer able to give dinners or balls (her memory had faded badly), Mrs. Astor wandered as in a dream through those white and gilt halls, greeting old friends many years deceased, standing under the Duran portrait receiving guests in her old, cordial manner, smiling at all and whispering tidbits in the ears of favourites. At her dinner table sat the ghosts of forgotten Knickerbocker ladies and gentlemen eating canvasback duck and conversing of Paris and London and the latest on Fifth Avenue. Standing by the portrait of her father, she asked who he was; leaving for Europe, she remarked that in seven hours she would be in Queenstown.

On October 30, 1908, heart stimulants and oxygen failing, the grand Mrs. Astor died, at the age of seventy-seven.

The old families turned out en masse to pay final honour to the leader who had tried to shield them from the barbarian deluge of new money. For once, by her own direction, she was not "Mrs. Astor." The nameplate on her casket was inscribed: "Caroline Webster Astor." While the clergy of Trinity and St.

Thomas's consigned her soul to the mercy of God, the indomitable lady arose, as it were, triumphant beside her casket in the form of Carolus Duran's portrait, draped with ropes of green lilies.

With Mrs. Astor passed an epoch. Or rather the epoch had already spent itself, and Mrs. Astor lingered on. Never again could the old Colonial and Knickerbocker families hope to compromise judiciously with the new wealth within certain careful limits marked out by a Caroline Astor and a Ward McAllister. The old stock was dying out at the roots, both physically and in the pocketbook. Millionaires were as common as the sands on Bailey's Beach.

None would rise to claim the tiara of the departed. Society by 1908 was too diffuse, too varied in its tastes, too dispersed to be led by any one person. There were horsy sets, yacht-club sets, Lenox and Southampton as well as Newport sets. To the new generation the rewards for taking part in the Astorian carnivorous rites seemed to be mainly in fatty enlargement of the heart and hips, liver trouble and the gout. It wasn't worth it.

There were of course grand duchesses after Mrs. Astor as there had been before her time: Mrs. Cornelius Vanderbilt, who carried on in the old way between Fifth Avenue, Newport, and Europe; Mrs. Ogden Mills, who united old Livingston blood with California gold and set up the extra-exclusive Twenty; Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont, who had a chimpanzee as a guest at a champagne banquet; Mrs. Stuyvesant Fish, who was seeking to revolutionize society by cutting dinner down to fifty minutes flat.

But lacking a common denominator and a common rendezvous, such as Mrs. Astor's ball, society fell to pieces. Indeed, the sincerest tribute to the greatness of the departed was that she so personified an era that her name would forever be inseparable from Society's Gilded Age.

BOOK FIVE

JOHN JACOB IV

CHAPTER *i*

Youngest to Reign

UPON the death of his father in 1892, John Jacob IV became head of the American House of Astor at twenty-eight. He was the youngest yet to ascend the throne, and men wondered whether this heir to fifty million dollars would do better than William the Negligent.

Wall Street set little stock in the inventor of a machine to blow dust off roads, a marine turbine that never passed the experimental stage, or a rain-inducer that was never put to the test. The Astor who had devised a physical quality named apergy which reversed gravity and enabled earth-bound mortals to visit the ghosts of the departed on Saturn caused both hard-headed financiers and blue-blooded fellow aristocrats to smile patronizingly and wonder whether he might not be the first to speculate himself out of part of his fortune.

But the Astor Estate was safe enough even in the hands of this strange young man. He was content that Philip Kissam, Charles F. Southmayd, and Charles A. Peabody should administer his fortune, collect his rents, project new buildings. Unlike his wealthier cousin, William Waldorf in England, his extravagances did not turn to five-million-dollar palaces in the country or to million-dollar offices in the city. His pleasures included, to be sure, a two-million-dollar château on Fifth Avenue, a half million-dollar sports resort at Ferncliff, a new yacht occasionally. But so great and constant was his income that such expenditures impinged not at all upon his capital.

In realty matters he was content to follow the lead of his

English cousin. When William Waldorf built the immense Waldorf Hotel on the site of John Jacob III's home on Fifth Avenue, John Jacob IV decided to follow suit with an even grander one, the Astoria, on the site of his father William's house in the same block.

While it is likely that the two heads of the House of Astor could have invested thirteen million dollars to better advantage, money return was not their only concern in the Waldorf-Astoria. For William Waldorf at least three motives — vanity, revenge, and spite — entered into his calculations. Vanity, because the biggest, most ornate, most modern hotel in the world, the symbol of the Gay Nineties, would bear his name. "Meet me at the Waldorf," would be the cry of the fashionables; the very name would be used in ten thousand cities to cast a lustre over humbler places of public entertainment. Revenge, because New Yorkers who had spurned this Astor's bid for Congress and driven him (so he said) to England must needs pronounce his name and be reminded of their folly every time they glanced at his glittering hotel, read of it in the newspapers, or frequented the city's new social centre. They might not like Astor, but even his dourest critic would have to admit that the Waldorf was a noble addition to the city's life. Spite, because his detested aunt, *the* Mrs. Astor, would have her proud spirit humbled in the shadows of his great hotel and would be forced to flee up the Avenue. Indeed, the erection of such an enormous building would condemn all the homes of the old Knickerbockracy in the Thirties.

The Waldorf exceeded even its owner's expectations. It was said that Fifth Avenue was crowded with carriages from Washington Square to Fifty-ninth Street the night of its gala opening. The New York Symphony under Damrosch played in the Empire Room to fifteen hundred fashionables gathered from Boston, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Baltimore. Later they strolled through the elegant Palm Garden, glass-enclosed, where one dined à la carte and where gentlemen could smoke in the presence of ladies, thanks to special ventilation. That destroyed at one stroke the fine old English custom of the ladies leaving the gentlemen immediately after dinner. Next to the Palm

Garden but in full view through the glass wall was the Men's Café, to become the most noted male resort in town. In the lobby a Turk passed among guests, pouring coffee for them. Inspection revealed period furniture and flowers in each room. On every floor bellhops, waiters, and maids were stationed for prompt service. Breakfast in bed — a sinful Parisian custom — was possible at the Waldorf.

The genius behind these innovations was George C. Boldt. It was said that austere Abner Bartlett, Astor's manager, a tall thin fellow elongated by his stovepipe hat and Henry Clay neckgear into a perfect picture of the bluenose, went to Philadelphia occasionally to enjoy himself. On these excursions Boldt, proprietor of the Bellevue Hotel, was his host. Bartlett recommended him for regisseur and conductor of the new Waldorf. His was the light touch that saw to it that each lady guest had flowers in her room, that provincials stopping there en route to Europe had a basket of fruit and champagne sent to their boat with his compliments. This grand manner captivated the legion of Americans who passed through his doors and assured the success of Astor's enterprise. Never grander was his tone than when he dealt with a thrifty soul who complained that his bill was too high. Boldt tore the bill in two and told the complainant he need bother neither to pay nor to return, since the Waldorf was only for those who could afford the best.

It was after Jack Astor surveyed his cousin's success that he decided to build an even bigger and grander Waldorf to be known as the Schermerhorn. Sincerest flattery, and another feather in the English Astor's cap in pleasing contrast to William Astor's threat when he first heard of the hotel project, that he would build New York's biggest stables next door. It was Boldt who suggested to Jack that he erect a similar hostelry on the half of the block between Thirty-third and Thirty-fourth Streets that once had sheltered *the* Mrs. Astor's aristocratic home. The two hotels were to be operated jointly although built in such a way that if family jealousies flared in the open, each would be independent. Perhaps because William Waldorf objected to the name of Schermerhorn as glorifying his aunt beyond her deserts, Waldorf-Astoria was hit upon as a fitting compromise.

In 1895 work started on the new Astoria and two years later the Bradley-Martins' fancy-dress ball, the most costly social affair ever held in America, marked the opening of the world's only eight-million-dollar hotel. The Waldorf-Astoria, combining caravanserai, vaudeville show, and shopping centre, became the crossroads of America. Along its Peacock Alley was New York's greatest sight, millionaires by the dozen and their ladies promenading in full view of the middle classes. Expanding New York society which could not be squeezed into Mrs. Astor's ballroom found full scope in the great public rooms of the mammoth hotel. It was filled with restaurants and cafés to every taste from lavish formal dining-rooms and banquet halls to intimate tea shops and cafés. Orchestras played as soothingly here as at Mrs. Astor's annual ball. Oscar, a former waiter at the Hoffman House and head waiter at the Waldorf, was installed as maître d'hôtel to the fanfare of such a publicity campaign that socialites bearing the oldest names in the city felt honoured to be greeted by "Oscar of the Waldorf." But though the new hotel might be the setting for society's fêtes, it depended on the provincials to fill its myriad rooms. Visitors to the big city with a few hundred dollars in their pockets stopped at the Waldorf to taste the finest in luxury that America afforded. As Oliver Herford quipped, Boldt "brought exclusiveness to the masses."

The lords of finance when they quit their offices in Wall Street at three p.m. headed for the Waldorf bar and the Astor restaurant — famed for containing the very furnishings of John Jacob III's dining-room — to continue their scheming and manœuvring. Diamond Jim Brady made the Waldorf bar his headquarters. Elbert H. Gary, Judge W. H. Moore, Daniel G. Reid, and William B. Leeds planned at the Waldorf their billion-dollar steel trust. In the Astor dining-room Bet-a-Million Gates and his crowd gambled for sums which would have been fortunes to humble people. Henry Clay Frick, who lived at the Waldorf before his Fifth Avenue palace was built, often sat in. Judge Gary, the Wheaton, Illinois, Sunday-school teacher, would ask to be let into the game, but if Gates thought the stakes were too high, Gary was told to seek less expensive

amusement. It was said that the biggest poker games of all time took place in that dining-room or the adjoining private room.

Abolition of the humiliating " Ladies' Entrance " at the Waldorf marked the approaching end of the Victorian era. Nor did fine ladies longer need to confine their social functions to their homes. It became socially correct to give teas and hold receptions at the Waldorf in the afternoon because it was more than a common hotel for commercial travellers, it embodied the social cachet of the Astor name itself. In a way the new hostelry tolled the knell of great private social affairs. Here were drawing-rooms, ballrooms, private dining-rooms as fine as any in the city, and for hire. Many a *grande dame* saw therein escape from budgetary limits imposed by unfeeling husbands, from the upkeep of hordes of servants and flunkeys, from all the details of management. Mr. Boldt offered to relieve them of their problems and gladly they accepted; even *the* Mrs. Astor was pleased to transfer many of her smaller affairs to the Waldorf. And not only in these ways did the Boldt-Astorian enterprise liberate ladies. It took the embarrassment of Mrs. John Jacob IV to push the movement for women's emancipation another step. That lady, wife of the owner of one half the Waldorf-Astoria, detained downtown one evening, was denied a room. The strict rule was that unescorted ladies after dark could not seek the refuge of a Waldorf bed. Not until a higher-up recognized her did she get in, with profuse apologies and a resultant slackening in the rule.

It was said that William Waldorf entered his grand hotel but once in his life, and that time he paced nervously down the Peacock Alley, his eyes on the carpet, and hurried into the elevator. His cousin Jack was seen there more often, but he was not the kind to attract much notice. Tall, slender, nervous, and shrinking, he disliked attention. His wife, quite the opposite in sociability, sparkled in the Palm Garden. Mrs. Harriman, Society's chronicler, watched her and wrote:

" I finally decided that Mrs. John Jacob Astor . . . was the most beautiful woman I had ever known. Sir William Orpen must want a great deal when he shouts from Paris that he has never had a perfect model. For at least 20 years after her mar-

riage to John Jacob Astor, New York Society had a flawless beauty. It was not alone a beautiful face but the tout ensemble, arms, wrists, hands, ankles and a brilliant distinction that was unforgettable."

Such beauty made all the more unforgivable the cheap yellow-journalistic trick of the *World* in sneaking a camera on to the golden sands of Bailey's Beach and snapping her, unsuspecting, in short skirts and tights while doing the czardas. Her husband was terribly annoyed at the shocking indecency of reproducing a lady so scantily clad, but then the *World* usually annoyed him anyway.

In many ways she resembled Mrs. John Jacob III in her trimness, her light mannerisms and freedom from pompous dignity, even in the fact that she patronized the Browning Class where her predecessor had patronized the Causeries du Lundi. Apparently she got on well with her mother-in-law, *the* Mrs. Astor, perhaps because their dissimilarity removed any cause for competition. *The* Mrs. Astor was the stout ship of the line, ponderous, awesome in dignity and inevitability; the younger Mrs. Astor was the trim and shapely clipper, clean-cut and elegant.

She, too, delighted in balls, affairs as gorgeous as her mother-in-law's. Her diamonds rivalled that lady's in everything but stomacher and some extra necklaces. In variety of favours she was not to be excelled: at one fête she drove a flower-covered gilded sleigh drawn by liveried servants and containing fancy wands, fans, gold sticks, and silver bric-a-brac for the delectation of her guests. On such occasions Mme Nordica, Mme Melba, Signor Campanari, or Leo Stern amused the company, Wetzler's orchestra played, and Sherry's presided over the supper. It was into such an affair, with the good Bishop Potter present, that the elder Mrs. Astor smuggled her daughter, the erring Charlotte Augusta. The prelate was genuinely distressed later to find that he had been in the same room with a woman whose name had been smirched and who had been divorced, to boot.

Jack Astor appeared dutifully at his wife's major functions, being in that regard less intransigent than his father. But he much preferred the solitude of Ferncliff, "the spot on earth

JOHN JACOB ASTOR IV (1864-1912)

the son of William Astor, head of the American branch of the family. He was distinguished only by wealth.

PHOTO, BROWN BROTHERS

MRS. JOHN JACOB ASTOR IV

(née Ava Lowle Willing), the mother of Vincent Astor. She later married Lord Ribblesdale.

PHOTO, BROWN BROTHERS

upon which his interest and affection specially centers, where his ingenuity is most displayed and where his exhaustless resources are most lavishly bestowed." There he operated a model dairy, played with steam power, and introduced electricity, that "triumph and superlative of delicious living." The jewel of Ferncliff was the marble swimming-pool, tennis court, and bachelor's quarters built by Stanford White to supplement the old-fashioned country mansion William Astor had built in the 1850's.

Devoutly religious, the master of Ferncliff provided a good example to his hundred employees (to whom he was "Mister Jack") by attending regularly the Church of the Messiah at Rhinebeck and presenting a window of Tiffany's favrile glass in memory of his father.

As befitted a gentleman interested in invention, Astor became an automobile enthusiast. His garage, soon after the dawn of the horseless-carriage era, stocked eighteen cars ranging from a red runabout for his wife to a seventy-horse-power European racer. Driving became a passion after that fine June day in 1900 when, accompanied by a mechanic, he chugged up and down Fifth Avenue while his wife and her dog followed in a hansom cab. Later on, having become an accomplished driver, he took part in the sensation of the Newport season, its first automobile party. The procession of nineteen cars left Mrs. Belmont's Belcourt in a din of explosions, and the faster carriages were soon galloping at twenty miles an hour, rocking like boats in a heavy sea. Mrs. Adolph Ladenburg entrusted her life to Jack, and Mrs. Astor had Harry Lehr for pilot.

Early in 1901 Astor ordered an electric carriage "the size of a Fifth Avenue stage" for service on his estate. That summer he had his first wreck, the car catapulting him and his son, William Vincent, then bobbing about until the "machinery stopped." Already noted for his driving prowess, he was named on a committee for a national highway and he offered an old mansion on property he had bought adjoining Ferncliff to the New York Automobile Club as a rendezvous for motorists making the hazardous trip between New York and Albany. Racing to New York from Newport in 1903, he made 115 miles in four

hours and twenty minutes. Then he heard "creaking in the joints" and was hauled into Guilford, whence he summoned the *Nourmahal* to pick him up.

Jack Astor had as many mishaps with his yacht as with his cars. When the *Nourmahal* ricocheted off New Hamburg Reef in the Hudson and had to be beached, he cashiered the captain. A few weeks later, racing through the traffic of New York harbour against J. P. Morgan's *Corsair*, he ran into a ferry. At the America's Cup races in 1901, he rammed the *North Star*. The *Nourmahal* nearly went over on her beam-ends, spilling tea over quite a few fashionables. He sued for fifteen thousand dollars. But by that time his yacht had been in so many collisions that it was said wise captains gave him wide berth.

In the winter of 1902–3, the 275-foot *Nourmahal* was changed from bark to three-masted schooner rig, her speed was raised to seventeen knots, and the interior redecorated. The dining-room, running the full width of the ship, could accommodate sixty guests. A novelty at sea in those days was the electricity that lighted saloons and cabins. The reconditioned vessel carried a forty-two-foot steam launch, the fastest in New York waters, a private launch, a steam gig, a gasoline messenger launch and six lifeboats. Fearing pirates in Mediterranean and Caribbean waters, she was equipped with four Hotchkiss rapid-firing guns.

But in 1904 the *Nourmahal* was on the rocks again, this time in Brenton's Cove at Newport. The captain was fired although inspection showed that a buoy out of position was responsible for the accident. Later a small spar buoy was placed over "Nourmahal Rock."

Jack Astor was no roaring bull of Wall Street, no fellow to worry overmuch about political matters or to use his wealth ostentatiously in unpopular ways. In 1893 he had covered himself with patriotic glory by being the first millionaire in years to answer the jury call.

Not so attractive a picture was afforded in 1894 in the Bnai Jeshurun scandal when he proposed to build stables at Sixty-fifth Street and Madison Avenue right against the sacred building. The trustees of Bnai Jeshurun offered $51,000, the Astor

Estate asked $75,000. Residents wrote a joint letter, the Astor Estate did not answer. A committee of two was named to interview Astor. He would not see them. Then $61,000 was offered, and refused. At another meeting of residents it was said that "Mr. Astor has treated us, his neighbors, with great discourtesy. . . . We condemn the spirit of Mr. Astor in disregarding our desires, interests and rights in the premises and we denounce his threatened act as unbecoming a land owner of this city, to which he is so greatly indebted." After they had been denied a permanent injunction, the fight was removed to Albany, where the Legislature promptly passed a law forbidding the erection of stables within one hundred feet of a church. Governor Flower (he who had defeated William Waldorf Astor for Congress) vetoed the bill.

Then the Astors turned magnanimous. Attorney Choate declared that "at the earnest solicitation of Mr. John Jacob Astor who desires to live on terms of peace and good will with his neighbors and fellow citizens," the estate's trustees had decided not to complete the stables.

The matter settled, Astor was troubled, late in 1894, with the strange case of John Garvey, who walked into the Astor mansion and went to sleep — or so it seemed — in the laundress's bed. It was during the Great Panic and many drew from homeless Garvey's sensational coup morals on wealth and poverty, landlords and their rights of eviction, the destitute and their right to sleep.

Young Astor was doubly indignant at Garvey and at the court for assessing only a small fine for so heinous a crime. "It did not seem right to me," he said, "that a man can enter a house of any citizen and only be fined $5. My mother is frightfully alarmed over the matter and something must be done to punish this man so he will not repeat his offense. If he goes free in this way there may be hundreds of others doing the same thing and I cannot have that."

Just as Astor was threatening to have Garvey rearrested, someone hurried into court to pay the five-dollar fine. Garvey disappeared.

Astor spluttered with indignation. "I am utterly at a loss to

understand why anyone would want to pay the fellow's fine and let him get away," he said. " I think it is a most outrageous act. The idea of a man's being able to enter a house at night and escape with the punishment of two days in prison! A great piece of injustice has certainly been done." He was back in court, followed by his head butler, his laundress, and his footman to tell of the now celebrated crime of " the Astor tramp." Garvey was picked up in a Bowery lodging-house and indicted for burglary.

Locked up in the Tombs, Garvey found plenty of sympathizers. Food was sent in to him and an offer was made to furnish bail. But Garvey said it was raining and he had no place to go. It was discovered that he was not quite sound mentally because of a spinal injury. Nevertheless " the Astor tramp " was sentenced to one year in the penitentiary.

All in all, even with " Astor tramps," auto wrecks, and the mishaps of the *Nourmahal,* life was hardly thrilling to young Astor. Not for him were the triumphs and defeats of the business man fighting for profits or facing bankruptcy, of the workingman landing a job or losing one. Life was a succession of winter cruises and summer dalliance on his yacht, of tinkering at Ferncliff, of attendance on his wife's brilliant social functions at 840 Fifth Avenue or Newport, with the monotonous affairs of the Astor Estate as a constant accompaniment.

From humdrum Jack found relief in speed and military adventure. He loved to roar along the country roads in a racing car, to bump and plough through the seas in a fast boat, to take the throttle of an Illinois Central engine (he was a director of that railroad) and dash along the rails at sixty-five miles an hour. He was delighted, too, when Governor Levi P. Morton named him colonel. Resplendent in his new uniform, he could attend the Governor's functions at Albany; his cruises in the Caribbean assumed new interest as he scanned the Spanish islands and developed the idea that Cuba should be annexed.

" I should like the Republican platform better," he said in 1896, " if it were more strongly in favor of the annexation of Cuba. I look upon the matter as an important one owing to the resources of the island and its commercial relations with the

United States. They have gold mines in Cuba and iron mines of hematite ores which scientists have pronounced the best iron ore in the world."

When war was declared, he was already self-mobilized for the remarkable campaign which resembled more the assembly of feudal chiefs with their bands than a modern military engagement. Politicians and millionaires rushed upon Washington to obtain glittering commissions. Accompanied by Douglas Robinson, a trustee of the Astor Estate who was related to Theodore Roosevelt, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, Astor begged to be attached to the staff of whatever general would be first in Cuba. Secretary of the Interior Bliss, a power in New York and national Republicanism, introduced Astor to the Secretary of War, General Miles, and President McKinley. Miles promised to help "if possible." To reinforce his claim to consideration, Astor placed his *Nourmahal* at the government's disposal, announced the gift of a mountain battery complete with a company of artillerymen — at a cost of $75,000 — for service in the Philippines, and urged the Illinois Central to move volunteers free of charge over its lines. Assistant Secretary Roosevelt lauded Astor's patriotism.

He was named inspector general with the rank of lieutenant colonel, much to the disgust of old Army men, who felt they were being elbowed out of choice promotions through the political pull of wealth. Mr. Dooley published a piece on the appointment of Astor and others that caused much merriment in the Army, although Major General Hugh L. Scott recalled later that "while this was all very funny as satire, the methods of appointment satirized were not good for building armies and you may be certain that they were held in mind when it came to organizing for the World War as methods to be avoided." The *New York Times* spoke of the Astor appointment and others of similar nature as "without relevancy to the good of the service."

His first assignment was to accompany the Chief of Staff for an inspection of the Southern camps. He managed to get on the transport *Seguranza* bound for Cuba, but there were too many foreign military attachés, literary gentlemen, and gen-

erals for a mere inspector general to rate much consideration. Armed with glasses, he inspected the Battle of San Juan Hill until he was brusquely ordered to "get out of this hellspot." He retreated out of shrapnel range only to get into rifle fire, but fortunately was not wounded. Later he caught the fever sleeping on the grass under a tent, witnessed the burning of Cervera's fleet, and was dispatched to Washington to bear messages. He was then given leave to recover from the fever. That ended his active war service.

In the meantime the Astor Battery under the command of Lieutenant Peyton C. March was off for the Philippines, where they took part in the capture of Manila.The boys came marching home early in 1899.

The military campaign having ended soon after it started, the real war began in Washington, with Army officers and politicians brawling over credit, honour, promotion, and blame. Roosevelt was especially bitter: "It is rumored they recommend me for a similar brevet to that recommended for Jack Astor!" Such rivalries did not keep the Murray Hill Republican Club from booming Roosevelt for Governor and Astor for Congress. Boss Croker was insolent in his comment: "I will stick to it that Astor is an ass and that an ass even though an Astor has no business in the Congress of the United States."

But Jack had no taste for political honours. He may have remembered his cousin Willy's dour experiences in that line. Instead he left for Europe and found that the Spanish War had been "a great big advertisement" for the United States there. "Nothing else could have accomplished the same thing in so short a time."

Flushed with patriotism, the Colonel looked askance at his cousin's oath of allegiance, given in 1899, to Queen Victoria. "My grandmother," said Astor, "was a sister of Colonel Henry B. Armstrong and a daughter of General Armstrong. They were both true Americans and the Armstrong blood is strong in me." His choice of boast was revealing. Even in the fourth generation the Astors were not pointing with pride to the Founder.

Jack's contribution to the public welfare was not confined to

martial exploits. He invented a marine turbine in which the inner shaft and the outer shell revolved in opposite directions. Twin screws thus would act along the same axis, cutting out the rotary motion of water and leaving a "dead" wake behind the ship. His patent, given to the public, would, he hoped, reduce weight, increase engine efficiency, and cut the loss of power in friction.

For farmers there was the vibratory disintegrator, which produced gas from peat, and a rain-inducer. Through a tower on a high hill, a high-power blower would send warm, moist air up a pipe to precipitate rain. "I have never tried the rain-inducer," Astor admitted, "but it would probably work." His pneumatic road-improver actually did work. An air blast was directed downward and outward to remove dust from the roads of Ferncliff, which extended a mile and a half along the Hudson and two miles back. Feasible also was his idea of gluing vacuum cups to the legs of steamer deck chairs.

His inventions indicated a lively imagination, a trait shared with his cousin, William Waldorf. But while the English Astor preferred to let his imagination play over Italy's past, Jack used his to project the future. Early in the 1900's he wrote:

"As zoology shows us the amphibian metamorphosed into the land vertebrate, followed by the bird, so history reveals the aborigine's dugout, the Fifth Avenue omnibus and the oxcart followed by the automobile which is preparing the light and powerful engine that will soon propel the flying machine. That will be a happy dawn for earthdwellers for war will become so destructive that it will probably bring its own end; and the human caterpillar, already mechanically converted into the grasshopper, will become a fairly beautiful butterfly.

"Street pavements will of course be smooth and easily cleaned — asphalt, bitumen, macadam or sheet steel; and to keep horses in large cities will doubtless be prohibited by the board of health as stabling cows, pigs or sheep is now.

"Second story sidewalks composed largely of translucent glass, leaving all the present street level to vehicles are already badly needed . . . and will doubtless have made their appearance in less than 20 years."

As a prophet Astor excelled H. G. Wells, who then was scoffing at the idea of airplanes.

A lively imagination coupled with a literary flair (common to both the reigning Astors) produced Jack's *A Journey in Other Worlds,* a book illustrated by Dan Beard and published by Appleton in 1894, which ran through several printings. In an earnest preface he counselled against the classical emphasis in education and literature and urged that men project their minds into the future in order to see more clearly the problems of the day. "Next to religion," he asserted, "we have most to hope from science."

The story opened on June 21, 2000, with Colonel Bearwarden, president of the Terrestrial Axis Straightening Company, supervising the pumping out of the Arctic in order to put the globe, as it were, on an even keel. This would even up the seasons. While an audience in New York could see by kintograph (television) men working in Baffinland, Dr. Bearwarden lectured on the progress of the work. Already the Aleutian Islands had been blown up to permit the Japanese Current to warm the Arctic.

Astor sketched in highlights of history between 1894 and 2000. The animosities of Europe had produced irresistible explosives and flying machines. The combination brought the threat of bombing cities with high-explosive and asphyxiating bombs. War thus became so terrible that the expected "Great War" never happened. Instead Canada, the United States, and Latin America united in a Federal Union and England extended her world dominion until the Pax Britannico-Americana mantled the globe, English became the world language, and triumphant Anglo-Saxons filled up the remaining empty places.

Professor Cortlandt, the interlocutor in the Astor book, explained what the world would be like in 2000. New York then had 14,500,000 inhabitants, ships in port stored energy from windmills on hollow masts, steam boilers at the foci of concave mirrors created power almost without cost and permitted the reclamation of the Sahara, canals were heated in winter to prevent their freezing, railways were run by magnetism, marine spider-ships scooted across inland seas at terrific speeds, flying

machines were propelled by electric batteries, and electric automobiles made speeds as high as thirty-five and forty miles an hour. Steel pavements were covered with asphalt, hot metal was siphoned from the bowels of the earth, rain was produced at will, and underground railways sped under New York City. Planning had been introduced into government.

Scientists had discovered apergy, the opposite of gravity, composed of positive, negative, and a hitherto unknown third kind of electricity. President Bearwarden told of the nature of apergy, how Elijah and Christ used it, how the mysteries of the Bible have been cleared up at last.

Our hero, Ayrault, takes leave of Sylvia Preston (Astor's book has a love theme), steps into the plate-glass cylinder, manipulates the apergetic levers, and is off for the planets. On Jupiter he finds that flowers sing like a pipe organ. On Saturn a strange music fills the air, the humming of the spirits as they come and go. "The air was filled with misty shadows and pulsating hearts, luminous brains and centers of spiritual activity quiver with motion." Spirits reveal to Ayrault the divine plan of the universe and warn him against agnosticism, scepticism and the materialistic tendencies on earth. Here on Saturn dwell the good souls; God sends the bad ones to Cassandra. Astounded by the marvels of Saturn and Jupiter, our hero nevertheless returned joyfully to earth, where he landed at Van Cortlandt Park and married Sylvia.

If much of Astor's literary and scientific work had a certain Buck Rogers flavour, reflecting dreams and unearthly speculations, it was because he himself lived in a world as unreal as any he ever imagined. It was a magic sphere and his chequebook the Aladdin's lamp which created yachts, estates, and Fifth Avenue palaces out of the effortless treasures of the Astor Estate. He belonged to a small company of men at the tiptop of the earthly system. They toiled not, neither did they spin, but all things were given unto them. Tens of millions of their fellow men regarded them with superstitious awe, dreamed of their great power, and wished themselves to live in that eerie land where chequebooks were open-sesame. But the gods of the Fifth Avenue Olympus looked down upon the sweating

multitudes and were displeased. From them ascended a meaningless babble, distorted in the fantastic columns of Hearst and Pulitzer. The doings of these creatures were as incomprehensible to the money-deities as the scurrying of an ant-hill; there was no bond of human relationship between the slum-dwellers and the few who moved about in an upper world of noble hills along the majestic Hudson, of town houses combining the magnificence of the Italian, French, and American princes, of floating palaces for the sea and million-dollar " cottages " in Newport.

The crowd below lacked significance, and their problems failed to make sense. William Waldorf tried to touch reality in his bid for public honour, was rebuffed, and fled into the world of the Borgias, of castles in England and a dream palace at Sorrento where he was in intimate contact with antiquity. His cousin Jack fled into the realm of Buck Rogers pseudoscience in the interstellar spaces. The years of his own life providing little of absorbing interest, he speculated on the year 2000; the possibility of changing the world much in his lifetime seeming remote, he dreamed of changing the earth's axis in the years to come.

CHAPTER *ii*

Tenement-House Reform

When John Jacob IV descended from the interstellar spaces to consider mundane affairs, orthodoxy bounded his mind in politics, religion, and business. There was only one party which combined integrity, intelligence, safety, and patriotism, and when it was out of power he viewed the future darkly. Host to the Grand Duke Alexander in 1893 when panic was crashing in Wall Street, he was astonished by his titled guest's enthusiasm for America. "There is the devil to pay in the Street," he reminded the Grand Duke. "I regret to admit that the whole country stands on the brink of a precipice." Mark Hanna's canvass in 1896 excited his hopes; in Chicago for a meeting of the Illinois Central board, he declared patriotic men had but one choice. Wild threats were abroad that factories would close if Bryan were elected. Although he admitted having no way to make "direct observation of the relations between workmen and their employers in this campaign . . . I look upon the claims that men are being coerced as absurd."

In religion Astor was a devout Episcopalian who served as vestryman for Trinity, to which he gave six bronze doors by Karl Bitter. The reconciliation of science and religion he regarded as the task of learned men and he was happy to project an explanation of Biblical miracles through "apergy" which would satisfy both the wise and the devout.

He did not believe much in philanthropy. He gave sparingly to Trinity's poor, five thousand dollars for a new Press Club building, and a cheque toward buying James Russell Lowell's

house in Cambridge. Mme Melba, from personal experience, declared that the epithet "Scotch" was almost too generous for him. She pondered the contradiction of this strange character, a mixture of kindness and indifference. His parties were magnificent, but he seemed aloof, abstracted, a visitor who surveyed the throng with eyes which soon lost interest. Even his voice bespoke the man: it was metallic and seemed to snip the sentences rather than say them.

His presence at board meetings of Western Union, Equitable Life, New York Life, Illinois Central, Mercantile Trust, Title Guarantee & Trust, Astor National Bank, Plaza National Bank, Niagara Falls Power, National Park Bank, and Delaware & Hudson was perfunctory. He had little interest in the practical affairs at stake and nothing much to offer except his lustrous name. When the great insurance scandals of 1906 smeared that, it was unnecessary for him to do any scrubbing. Men understood that it was not this John Jacob Astor who had done any of the scheming and plotting with other people's money. His name was a symbol used for window-dressing; the real culprits must be sought elsewhere.

Perhaps that was the reason why his slums attracted so little attention. It seemed useless to complain to the fourth John Jacob about conditions down on Avenue A or on the West Side. If by some chance his attention could have been directed to his tenements, he would not have comprehended why people should complain. All slums were that way, not just his; in any event in a free country people were under no compulsion to choose him as landlord. Actually there was little articulate protest. The only authentic voice of the slums was heard in the Socialist papers, and their editors subscribed to the idea that the poor were exploited by employers. That being true, there was little point in becoming excited about landlords or slums, for exploitation was at the point of production in the workshop, not at the point of consumption, in the dwelling.

And so it was left to a young Danish reporter, neither slum-dweller nor slum-owner, but with his eyes on both Fifth Avenue and Avenue A, to see the slums as they were and to mix compassion and indignation in his description. Jacob Riis be-

came famous as the first man to dramatize the contrast between Fifth Avenue châteaux and First Avenue tenements owned by the same people.

"In the Astor tenements on Elizabeth Street where we found 43 families living in rooms intended for 16, I saw women finishing 'pants' at 30 cents a day," he wrote. Carefully this reporter measured the three rooms, each of which often housed a family: one was 14 by 11 feet, one 7 by 11, the other 7 by 8½. Only one flat in this tenement had one family in it; three had two each; twelve had a family to each room. The building was one of the notorious old "dumbbells," with a dark, narrow, evil-smelling air shaft. Of all kinds of slum dwellings, said the Tenement House Commission of 1894, "it is the one hopeless form of tenement construction. It cannot be ventilated, it cannot be well lighted; it is not safe in case of fire." The Commission searched records for anything in the Old World to compare with the dumbbell, the result of William Waldorf Astor's labours with others on the mayor's tenement-reform committee of 1879.

At 260–270 Elizabeth Street there had been no water for a month because the pipes were frozen. John Jacob Astor couldn't know that, of course, because he was not responsible for maintenance. That had been entrusted to an Italian undertaker, as lessee, who "combined with his business of housing his people above and below ground that of the padrone, to let no profit slip."

Riis looked into the tenement laws and found that administration was split between the health and building departments, the latter even more compliant to the wishes of contractors and tenement-owners than the former. The journalist interested the young police commissioner, Theodore Roosevelt, in the problems bared by his midnight trips with the sanitary police. Proceedings were begun, then halted by efforts at arbitration.

"The half that was on top," said Riis, "cared little for the struggles and less for the fate of those who were underneath so long as it was able to hold them there, and keep its own seat. The boundary line of The Other Half lies through the tenements."

It became fashionable for some of the Four Hundred to go slumming (particularly if their wealth came from other sources). There was the old lady who read about the dreadful slums. She ordered her carriage out for a tour and came back so horrified that she forthwith sold. The new landlord's standards are not recorded.

A special department was created in 1901 to enforce laws long existent and new provisions for fireproofing stairways and improving sanitary standards. The new tenement-house department surveyed the city and found 500 families to a block in the Astorian 17th Ward along Avenue A and First Avenue. Density per acre there was 311, contrasted with 125 in Paris, 57 in London, 67 in Tokyo, and 57 in Calcutta. The New York death-rate, inflated by the slums, was 23 per thousand, against 19 in Edinburgh, 23 in Glasgow, 24 in Dublin, 23 in Calcutta, 28 in Bombay.

In 1902 the "school sinks" and courtyard privies which had been a disgrace in 1880 were still found in many Astor properties. Forty years after the passage of fireproofing laws, many Astor tenements were still deficient. The department vacated 64 Avenue A and 159 East Fourth Street for sanitary reasons. Fire escapes were lacking at 69 Gansevoort, 233 Avenue A, and 6–8 Ninth Avenue.

The economics of fireproofing were enlightening. It cost $17,812 to build a hazardous tenement, $18,361 to build one partially fireproofed, and $20,342 one which was reasonably safe. Annual rents from a five-story walk-up on a twenty-five-foot lot were $4,260. Expenses, including taxes, were $452. The lots averaged $18,000 in value. So the gross return on a non-fireproof building was 11.74 per cent, on one partially fireproofed 11.6 per cent, and on one complying with the law 11 per cent. For a return of 74/100 of one per cent dozens of people were condemned to burn to death each year.

One of the worst Astor fires in history broke out on a winter's night in 1900 at 44 Bowery, a men's lodging-house. Flames started on the fourth floor and spread quickly to the fifth, sixth, and seventh. Within an hour five men were burned to death or suffocated and three were severely injured.

By 1898 many of the old tenements that William B. Astor had built after the Civil War were so deteriorated that the estate decided to sell. Of these and similar buildings a legislative committee reported that "among the very worst class of tenements . . . were those owned by certain individuals, estates and corporations and held in an inferior and unsanitary condition with the object of disposing of them at an advanced price when property in the neighborhood rises in value."

The Astor sales were followed by those of other estates. Sections of the East Side which for two generations had nourished some of the finest old Dutch names in the city passed under the ownership of individuals many of whom could barely speak English and certainly were no less greedy than the Astors, Rhinelanders, and Roosevelts.

The aura that had surrounded some of the oldest landholding families was dimmed. Burton J. Hendrick, glorifier of the great fortunes of the era, conceded that beneficiaries of the Astor Estate "can lay claim to no great genius, except the genius, perhaps the rarest of all, of profiting by others' labor. They have contributed practically nothing to upbuild the Republic and yet few have reaped so richly from its growth."

Harvey Sutherland, another glorifier, excepted Russell Sage and John Jacob IV, "poles apart from the others." "The Astors," he wrote, "have no pawnshops; they run no errands; they do not haul or stage-drive. They peddle no oil or drygoods or sugar; they do not even find out for us what wheat will cost three months from now. . . .

"But the Astors buy land and they keep it. I do not think they even promise to make rents cheaper. If they do not get the price they think they ought to from a piece of property, they let it lie idle rather than scale the rent. Or they let you pull the house down and build on a 21-year lease. You are expected to fetch to the office of their estate all that persons of your station can spare from their income for the privilege of standing on a patch of ground without interruption. At the end of 21 years, the Astor Estate has all the ground rent of the house you have built. The shirt-sleeves at the initial end of the Astor line are now four generations back. The terminal shirt-sleeves are

not in sight. It behooves a Gould or a Vanderbilt to have all his wits. An Astor needs but to sit tight and to receive his rents."

A spectacular brawl broke out in Wall Street in 1896 over Astor's Schermerhorn Building. The neighbouring American Surety Building was interfering with the Astor air rights; the estate retaliated by threatening to build a twenty-one-story structure that would blot air and light out of the lower stories of the Surety Building. American Surety surrendered and leased the Schermerhorn Building for ninety-nine years at $75,000 a year.

There was another legal squabble when the New York, Westchester & Boston, a suburban line, wanted to pay $21,000 for Astor land in the Bronx needed for a right of way. The estate held out for $129,000 and got it.

In 1898 Henry Morgenthau bought some of the Astor land in the radish-patch district around Avenue A, much to the distress of lessees who had erected their own buildings and feared the Morgenthau firm would not renew leases. Tenants held fearsome meetings, appealed to the Astor Estate, to far-off William Waldorf, but with little result. John Jacob IV followed his cousin's example (as in other pieces of real-estate strategy) by disposing in 1900 of some fifty tenements in the First Avenue district for $850,000 to thrifty Germans who had saved a few thousands for a down payment. In many cases they paid more than the Astor valuation; in any case a single lot and tenement brought in more than the Founder had paid for the entire radish patch.

By 1900 the English Astors were reckoned to be receiving a gross return of $6,000,000 a year, and the American family $3,000,000. The Astor Estate was estimated to be worth $200,000,000, against $40,000,000 only twenty-five years before — the most phenomenal growth ever recorded for such a fortune. Looking down the future, Burton J. Hendrick could see it worth a billion in 1920 and eighty billions by 2000 — the year of John Jacob IV's projected apergetic flight to Jupiter. It was indeed the world's greatest monument to unearned increment, a "first mortgage on Fate itself." The Thompson farm along Fifth Av-

enue where the new Waldorf-Astoria stood was now valued at $35,000,000, a thousand times what William Backhouse had paid for it; twenty-five-foot lots along Thirty-third Street were valued at $200,000; the annual lease of fifty front feet along Fifth Avenue was $36,000. As the aristocrats fled their brownstones, Tiffany's and Gorham's moved in, and that section became the most luxurious shopping district in the city.

Up at Longacre Square, William Waldorf Astor in 1904 erected the Astor Hotel where thirty years before cows had grazed. The *New York Times* moved uptown to the new theatre centre and had the name changed to Times Square. Jack countered his cousin's enterprise by building the Knickerbocker Hotel at another corner of Times Square and then the St. Regis. A visiting Frenchman, amazed at the Astor prowess, cried out:

"This man, this individual, who has only two arms and two legs, one head, yes, and even a limit to his capacity for enjoyment, could stroll down Broadway or Fifth Avenue and stretch his arms hither and yon, saying: 'Mine! mine! all mine!'"

His renown brought floods of letters from every corner of the universe. A fellow in Stockholm wrote:

> Mr. John Jacob Astor
> *The Richest Man in All the World*
> *New York*
> *U. S. A.*
> Honored Sir:
>
> I would like you to send me at once 30,000 thalers, a mere bagatelle to you but a fortune to me. Send the check at once as I need the money very bad.
>
> Yours to command,
>
> ——— ———

CHAPTER *iii*

John Jacob the Little

At first it was no more than a polite rustle of gossip. Mr. and Mrs. Jack Astor were not enjoying each other's company; she was spending the winters in London, he was on his yacht in Caribbean or Mediterranean waters. Ava enjoyed the company of the smart set and Bohemia; Jack was bored equally by both. She was gay and at forty, with hair silvered, still the most sparkling beauty in the Four Hundred; he was self-centred, almost morose, preoccupied with the problem of extracting satisfaction from his millions.

In the winter of 1905 the Colonel went to Europe while Mrs. Astor stayed in Washington with a sister. The next summer they were not to be seen in Newport. Ava had gone to Aix-les-Bains. William Vincent, their only son, then fifteen, was more likely to be seen with his father; little Ava Alice Muriel, the only daughter, with her mother. Mostly, though, the children were seen with neither.

Whatever the gossip in the Palm Garden at the Waldorf, divorce was unthinkable for a John Jacob Astor. He was a devout High-Church Episcopalian and in any event his mother, *the* Mrs. Astor, an old woman much saddened by death and divorce, must not be disturbed. Besides, the very name of John Jacob Astor stood for all the proprieties of recognized social life. The man who bore that name — whatever his personal qualities — was Society's fashion-plate, and bound by the principle of *noblesse oblige*. Yes, divorce was unthinkable.

But in time *the* Mrs. Astor died, and Society rubbed its eyes

in astonishment at the Opera when not one Astor appeared in Box No. 7, sacred to New York's leading family. The presence of Mrs. Lydig, shining with a Renaissance stomacher of diamonds built in three sections, and accompanied by the Clarence Mackays, was no solace. "That the famous No. 7 would not be occupied by a representative at least of the Astor family on every Monday night," commented a chronicler, "was a blow to the prestige of the Diamond Horseshoe for which no number of financiers in attendance could atone." The social significance of the Opera declined sharply.

In the summer of 1909 Mrs. John Astor, as she was beginning to style herself, arrived alone at the Ritz in London. In the early fall she arrived, alone, in New York. Then she went west, an unusual thing for an Astor, while the Colonel and his son Vincent were cruising among the West Indies. Divorce now seemed not so unthinkable.

The news broke like a thunderclap on November 9, 1909. In greatest secrecy Mrs. Astor had been granted a divorce on the usual grounds at New City, a county seat few New Yorkers had ever heard of. A train had taken Supreme Court Justice Mills, Referee Charles H. Young, Henry W. Taft, brother of the President and attorney for Mrs. Astor, and Lewis Cass Ledyard, for the Colonel, up to New City the day before. Mills climbed on the bench, Taft in a low voice presented the motion, the Justice hastily confirmed the referee's report. Taft then asked that the papers be sealed. And it was all over.

Never had a legal action concerning such prominent figures been dispatched so quickly, so noiselessly. The name of Astor had not once been heard in the Rockland County Courthouse room. No prying reporter could examine the records. The New York papers roared with indignation at having been cheated of their quarry in the biggest society story of the year. "Such proceedings," wailed the *Sun*, "tend to confirm the popular impression that there is one law for the rich and another for the poor." A fellow Justice in the Supreme Court lashed at Mills: "The real reason is not so much the protection of public morals as it is to cloak with secrecy the names of the persons involved and this suggests the idea of privilege and favoritism. Of all the

evils which may assail the administration of justice, this is the most insidious and great care should be taken to avoid even the appearance of exceptions for favored persons." Justice Mills replied: "I ordered the papers sealed on account of the children."

Ava's home-town newspapers burst with the tidings. The Philadelphia *Public Ledger* balanced both sides of the case: "There is no doubt that much public scandal was avoided in the swift secrecy of the Astor divorce. Only a prurient curiosity is disappointed in the suppression of the testimony, to the advantage of the public taste and morals. On the other hand, it may be asked whether such swiftness and secrecy do not constitute a scandal of at least equal importance."

The *North American* rehashed gossip from the time of Ava's engagement and marriage: "The divorce will recall reports eagerly discussed in Philadelphia's highest social circles at the time of the marriage, that she was not at all eager to marry Mr. Astor. According to gossip then current, she, weeping and protesting even to the eve of her marriage, pleaded with her parents to be permitted to break the engagement."

Mrs. Astor, finally located at French Lick, would say nothing. The Colonel, at Kingston on the *Nourmahal,* said he had left to avoid "meddlesome people." Mrs. Astor passed through New York soon after, bound for London and followed by the pert rimes of *Town Topics:*

Ava, Ava, thou art treading
  In the paths the great have trod;
Hustle up and pack thy bedding,
  Hie thee to a foreign sod,
Where some Barkis will be Willing
  In an over-Baring way
To perform the usual billing
  Which you've lacked for many a day.

Whatever the secrecy shrouding the divorce, there was none about the reasons. If a charming worldly woman, the toast of two continents, found herself bound to a man distinguished

only by wealth, so loose had marriage ties become by 1909 that there was no digrace in divorce (indeed, it seemed that the world of fashion sympathized heartily with Ava Willing). There was little harmony between the rather gloomy Colonel and the vivacious comely Ava, whose bright eyes loved to survey the Waldorf-Astoria and the Ritz, who thrilled to the company of statesmen, novelists, painters, and the élite — and detested stuffy yachts, where she felt cabined, cribbed, and confined. So Ava passed on to London, to become the leader of the Anglo-American set of expatriates, seasonal visitors, and diplomats — the one person privileged, the following spring, to give a London dinner to Colonel Theodore Roosevelt in his triumphal progress across Europe from the Nile to England. There Mrs. John Astor was to reign for twenty years or more, combining in her person the highest social values of the New World and the Old, cementing the Pilgrim and English-Speaking Union ties which were to be so useful to the mother country in time of dire distress.

On his return from the Caribbean after the divorce, Jack gave a lavish ball at 840 Fifth Avenue in the tradition of his hallowed mother, announcing to the Four Hundred, as it were, that John Jacob Astor was still John Jacob Astor. *The* Mrs. Astor as immortalized by Duran in her royal purple and diamonds looked down upon the corridors sacred to her, but it was doubtful if her spirit derived much pleasure from her son's divorce. The ball was notable for its absentees; Ava's friends had organized a militant counter-party that night at Sherry's.

By the winter of 1910–11, Society was no longer to be denied its right to meet, united, for the immemorial parade down the Astor halls. The Four Hundred viewed a renovated house, done over from the old duplex days when *the* Mrs. Astor occupied one half and her son and daughter-in-law the other. The grand staircase which led merely to bedrooms had been torn out and replaced by a central court. The reception room had been replaced by a dining-room of " rare beauty and distinction," dominated by a grand chandelier, tapestries, and a picture over the fireplace of the Founder, who had made all this magnificence possible. The old dining-room had become a library, domi-

nated by a tapestry on which cupids danced, but no books were visible.

Flanked by Mrs. Ogden Mills and Mrs. Douglas Robinson, the Colonel received homage from the Four Hundred. It was noted that he was most deferential to Madeleine Force, a pretty bud of the season marshalled under the wing of a formidable lady to be known as La Force Majeure.

That summer Madeleine was Jack's guest on his new boat, the *Noma*. *Town Topics* reported maliciously that "Mother Force has let no grass grow in getting her hooks on the Colonel." The engagement was announced the same season. The impending marriage of the forty-seven-year-old divorcé and the eighteen-year-old bud, younger than his son Vincent, caused ripples of tittering. And when Society tittered at a John Jacob Astor, it was a sign that the world had changed mightily since the days of the Founder, that imperial-minded world-girdler, or even of John Jacob III, austere embodiment of all the Victorian virtues.

In revenge for being deprived of legitimate prey in the divorce story of 1909, the newspapers determined to make a nine days' sensation out of Astor's marriage in 1911 to a girl young enough to be his daughter-in-law. In high spirits reporters flocked to Newport to welcome the triumphant arrival of the *Noma* with Madeleine and Mamma Force aboard. All the town was agog over an event that could be rivalled only by the coming of the King and Queen. Shop windows along Bellevue Avenue looked like boxes at the Opera, the newspapers reported, as Jack and Madeleine drove through to Beechwood, one-time summer palace of *the* Mrs. Astor.

The all-engaging subject then was: what Episcopalian rector would marry a self-confessed adulterer? Search of Newport and Little Compton revealed that rectors had been offered a thousand dollars to perform the ceremony and had righteously refused. Said the Reverend Edward L. Johnson of Newport, Episcopalian: "It was a lot of money to refuse and a big temptation to a poor minister but I do not feel that I could marry the couple whatever was offered."

What a strange pass a John Jacob Astor had come to! Re-

JOHN JACOB ASTOR IV

walking with his second wife, the former Madeleine Force, the mother of John Jacob Astor VI

PHOTO, BROWN BROTHERS

JOHN JACOB ASTOR IV

and his son William Vincent (1891-), now head of the American branch of the family—a perfect figure of the moneyed aristocrat.

PHOTO, BROWN BROTHERS

Archibald Gracie, a fellow aristocrat, praised his conduct. Astor, he said, lifted Madeleine, five months pregnant, into a boat and then asked permission to accompany her. The officer replied brusquely that no men could get in until all the women were accommodated. Astor argued that he wanted to protect his wife. That in vain, he waved good-bye and busied himself filling another boat. Dr. Washington Dodge reported that Astor was standing at attention by the side of Major Archie Butt as the *Titanic* sank. It was said that he did not drown, but was killed by flying debris when the boat plunged.

Joseph H. Choate, old-time lawyer for the Astor Estate and former Ambassador to England, gave the London *Times* a revealing picture of the fourth John Jacob:

" Why, he is a client of mine and I know all about him and the property and I must say I never had a client who seemed more capable of taking care of what he has got. . . .

" If some other sides of his character do not commend themselves to general esteem, we may surely let the veil of charity fall gently over all that."

Choate last met him at the Opera in the preceding November. The Colonel invited the aged lawyer-diplomat into his box to meet Madeleine. There was no one else in the box except Madeleine's sister.

" It was an open secret that New York had not looked favorably on the remarriage. The hostility of this dazzling company was evident. Mrs. Astor, scarce out of her teens, faced it with perfect composure. Neither her beauty nor her youth pleaded successfully for her. No friendly glance came their way. I talked with her for five interesting minutes and came away with an impression of intelligence, of charm also and character."

The Astors, said the old family lawyer, had planned to entertain on a lavish scale that winter, with dinners, dances, and two great balls. " But New York declined to be conciliated by these good intentions. It became clear that time must pass before Colonel Astor could expect to find himself surrounded by friends, as of old. They therefore decided to come abroad and spend the winter in Egypt instead of New York, and did so. It

was upon their return from this journey that they embarked on the *Titanic*.

"Had the Four Hundred or the Two Hundred and Fifty shown themselves less implacable, Astor would not now be lying at the bottom of the Atlantic off Cape Race. Again I think that we may say, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged.' It is no light business to take into mortal hand the jurisdiction of the Almighty.

"This at any rate was true of Astor generally; he knew what he wanted and how to get it. He had courage and independence of mind." Choate praised his "inexhaustible energy all through his life, which he lived in his own way, not in your way or mine, but his."

It was not until April 26 that Astor's body was identified and not until April 30 that the *Mackay-Bennett* arrived in Halifax, where Astor's son, Vincent, a youth of twenty, awaited the body with Nicholas Biddle, a trustee of the Astor Estate. The salvagers reported that there was twenty-five hundred dollars in the dead man's pockets.

The funeral was held at Rhinebeck with bells tolling, with the entire village present, with roses on the casket sent by the Prince of Wales, with the Reverend Dr. William T. Manning of Trinity ready to deliver a eulogy — omitted at Vincent's request. On hand to serve as pallbearers were Richard Delafield, Lispenard Stewart, Charles T. Hoffman, Stuyvesant Fish, and Peter Cooper Hewitt. The following Sunday the Reverend Dr. Ernest M. Stires of fashionable St. Thomas's on Fifth Avenue commended Astor for facing death in mid-ocean as courageously as he faced whistling bullets at San Juan Hill. "Friends," he said, "it is a glorious epitaph, 'He died like a brave man.'"

At any rate the church that had refused to remarry him was honoured to bury him. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum.*

Public interest shifted quickly from the fact of death to the fact of fortune, and particularly to Madeleine's share in her husband's will. But even those inured to Astorian wills were astounded to read that Madeleine, standing only on the thresh-

old of her adult life, had been forbidden to remarry under pain of losing the income of a $5,000,000 life trust and the use of 840 Fifth Avenue and Beechwood. It was revealed that Madeleine had abandoned her dower right in the Astor Estate in return for an ante-nuptial settlement of $1,695,000; if this sum seemed small, Madeleine could reassure herself that in any event she had been valued higher than the first Mrs. Astor, now in London. Ava had settled for $787,000.

For Madeleine's unborn child — to be John Jacob VI — a trust fund of $3,000,000 was set up.

Astor's daughter, Alice Muriel, was given a trust fund of $5,000,000, to be hers absolutely when she became twenty-one, but to revert to Vincent if she died childless.

Bequests were left to trustees and employees and $30,000 to St. Paul's School, which Jack had attended as a boy. And that summed up his philanthropies. It was a new low record for Astorian charity, but excited little attention because few expected much charity from this family.

To his son, William Vincent, who preferred to style himself simply Vincent, was left the rest of the estate and a request that he continue giving $1,500 a year for two silver cups to be sailed for by members of the New York Yacht Club. The fortune was appraised at $87,218,000 — the first time the public had ever had an exact accounting of the wealth of an Astor. That was nearly double what the fourth John Jacob had inherited twenty years before in 1892 from William Astor.

Perhaps Astor had left practically nothing to charity because he disapproved so intensely of the new estate tax which New York had levied. Mild as that tax was, $3,274,000, or 3.7 per cent, it was by far the largest involuntary single payment the Astors had ever made to the public purse.

It was possible for the first time to weigh popular estimates of the Astor Estate against official appraisal. It was generally reputed that the American Astors were worth $150,000,000 — the American branch in fact was worth 58 per cent of that figure. If the same percentage held for the public estimate of William Waldorf's fortune of $300,000,000, then he was worth about $175,000,000. Throwing in the collaterals at a minimum of

$13,000,000, the total of all the Astors was $275,000,000; allowing for conservatism in appraisal figures, probably over $300,000,000.

When this John Jacob's grandfather, William Backhouse, died in 1875, he left $40,000,000 to $50,000,000 to his sons. In thirty-seven years that hoard had increased sixfold — probably an all-time record for an estate whose possessors played, on the whole, a passive role.

To radicals fresh from the 1912 Presidential campaign with its cries of the New Freedom and the Square Deal, there seemed not the slightest justification for the quarter-billion increment in the Astor wealth, or for passing on money not earned by the sweat of Astor brows to sons who never would sweat. The young Nebraskan, Senator George W. Norris, denounced the vagary of birth that dumped $69,000,000 into the lap of Vincent Astor, himself not yet of age. He proposed a 75 per cent inheritance tax on such estates, but the proposal was snowed under by a horrified Senate.

Left as guardians were Vincent, his uncle James Roosevelt Roosevelt, Douglas Robinson, and Nicholas Biddle. His father threw over the Founder's injunction that the estate should be divided in half, one part given absolutely and the other held in trust. Vincent when he reached twenty-one was to have the entire fortune in fee simple.

Sixty-three million was in real estate, and $24,000,000 in personal property including stocks and bonds. Official appraisers and the tax assessor set these values:

	Appraisal	*Assessed Value for Taxation*
Astoria Hotel	$10,400,000	$ 8,815,000
Knickerbocker Hotel	4,875,000	3,650,000
St. Regis Hotel	3,975,000	2,640,000
Putnam Building	2,525,000	2,285,000
Astor House (one half)	2,400,000	1,800,000
840 Fifth Avenue	2,475,000	1,700,000
N.E. corner B'way and 42nd (land only)	2,125,000	1,887,000

	Appraisal	*Assessed Value for Taxation*
Cambridge Hotel	1,475,000	1,353,000
Schermerhorn Building	1,800,000	1,500,000
295–303 Sixth Ave., 100–108 West 19th	1,183,000	1,010,000
TOTAL	33,233,000	26,640,000

Of bonds, there were:

New York, New Haven & Hartford	$ 142,000
Niagara Falls Power Co.	2,468,000
Sterling British consols	170,000

Of stocks:

Albany & Susquehanna	$ 142,000
Amalgamated Copper	164,000
American Telephone & Telegraph	290,000
Astor Trust Co.	264,000
Bankers Trust	153,000
Delaware & Hudson	153,000
Farmers Loan & Trust	198,000
Illinois Central	1,295,000
Metropolitan Opera	100,000
Natl. Bank of Commerce	120,000
Natl. Park Bank	416,000
New York & Hudson River	4,650,000
New York Life	292,000
New York, New Haven & Hartford	859,000
Niagara Falls Power	1,213,000
Pullman	1,313,000
U. S. Trust	328,000
Western Union	348,000

The departed millionaire had $694,000 in cash on deposit with the Astor Trust Company and $271,000 with Morgan, Grenfell & Company.

His estate at Ferncliff was valued at $527,000, the furnishings of 840 Fifth Avenue at $629,000, exclusive of tapestries and

objets d'art. *The* Mrs. Astor's jewelry was valued at $161,000. Half of this was tied up in a diamond sunburst with 282 stones. A necklace with 204 stones was appraised at $60,000; a set of earrings at $12,000. But to the pained surprise and hot indignation of many a *grande dame,* it was revealed that she too was not above displaying paste jewels. Even as she sat in her opera box, the awe and shrine of her worshippers, phony sparklers flashed among the genuine. Apparently this custom was not confined to the Grand Old Lady of Society, for others took it as a personal insult that the fourth John Jacob should have been frank enough to make entries about paste diadems, the more so as the whole country was snickering. After 1913, dowagers flashing with gems excited not so much awe as suspicion; perhaps that was responsible in part for the swing of fashion away from quantitative display.

The death in bed of his distinguished ancestors had stirred up reams of obituaries, eulogies, appraisals, criticisms, moral judgments, sermons, and editorials at practically every crossroads. The death under dramatic circumstances of the fourth John Jacob excited little comment, aside from his bravery. There was even less to say of him than of his father. Orthodox moralists could not commend his life and remained silent. Radical moralists found much to say, but the subject of their criticism seemed too unreal to give much point to their gibes. This Astor had created his own world even more than his predecessors and was not to be judged by the standards that ruled workaday life.

Without his great-grandfather's wealth he would have passed his years in obscurity. His interest in science indicated that he might have become a good professor in an engineering school, happy in his usefulness. But the dead hand of the Founder decreed otherwise. By the fourth generation it became apparent that the Founder's will was more curse than blessing. It sentenced his descendants to gilded existences, isolated them from humanity in dour, ultra-sensitive Astorian egoism, frustrated their attempts to live normal lives. Even marriage for this Astor was a problem. His first wife was worthy, in beauty, charm, and wit, of being a symbolic Mrs. John Jacob Astor, but she found that the actual bearer of that name could not measure up to

the symbol. There could be no simple way out of such a trap. When he married a girl nearer his tastes, not brilliant or very beautiful, the name of John Jacob Astor once again closed in on its bearer. He did not measure up to the symbol, Society drew back in disgust, and common people guffawed.

The eager young man who had explored the possibilities of other worlds, whose active brain had worried over the problems of turbine engines, farm management, and navigation, became the jaded middle-aged millionaire. A mind alert became merely petulant. His millions had succeeded only in shielding him from the struggle through which other human beings develop themselves. Bitterly disappointed, he turned to an eighteen-year-old girl who offered him prettiness and amiability.

It was said that a barber standing beside Astor on the tilting deck of the *Titanic* begged him to put on a life-preserver and jump. "I am not going to jump," he answered.

Perhaps he felt there was no reason to struggle. Fate, as devised in the will of the first John Jacob, had dictated the life of this descendant, had circumscribed him within golden bonds, had removed the essence of life itself from him. Why should he strive? He might as well die at the age of forty-eight as at any other.

So passed John Jacob the Little, the first of the Astors to succeed in rubbing off the lustre of that great name. Having succeeded in that, however, he made the way easier for his posthumous son, John Jacob VI. By the time he became a man, none would marvel that a John Jacob Astor was not necessarily either a genius, an aristocrat, or even a normal human being.

BOOK SIX

THE COLLATERALS

CHAPTER *i*

Henry the Forgotten

"Daughters who die young need not be greatly lamented," said the Ulster-born father of Andrew W. Mellon. John Jacob Astor, of a more sentimental Rhineland ancestry, would not have agreed. Daughters young or old were to be cherished. Even so, he did not mean to scatter his fortune through any such nonsense as dividing his lands equally among sons and daughters. So when he gave his only surviving daughter, Dorothea, some $500,000 in real estate and stocks, he laid down the rule that Astor girls were to be comfortably dowered and no more.

His son William Backhouse and his grandson William continued that policy. And so eventually there were a dozen collateral branches of the Astor family which could be counted millionaires, thanks to the fabulous increase in Manhattan realty values. Such were the Bristeds, Langdons, Kanes, Chanlers, Delanos, Careys, Van Alens, Roosevelts, Draytons, and Wilsons. Despite their names, they were as authentically Astorian as any scion bearing the symbolic title of John Jacob, and were so accepted by society. If their fortunes seemed puny in comparison to the main stream, still they were considerable by any other standard. In an earlier generation they lived in fine houses in quiet LaFayette Place, and later in mansions that adorned Fifth Avenue and Madison Avenue. By right of ancestry they married into the finest families and some came eventually to gloss over, if not to despise, the Astorian side of their

blueblooded lineage. So bemused over such matters were some that it seemed more important that William Backhouse had married an Armstrong-Livingston girl than that the Founder had provided for their high living.

That an Astor would lower himself to marry beneath his rank was unthinkable; but when one did exactly that, and died childless, and when under the Astor rule his estate was distributed among his many relatives, it turned out to be manna from the skies for the Chanlers, Careys, Van Alens, Roosevelt Roosevelts, Draytons, Wilsons, de Steurs, Oberndorffs, and Zborowskis. Whatever this almost mythical Uncle Henry's dereliction may have been, it was a boon to them.

Grandson of the Founder, Henry the Forgotten was the brother of John Jacob the Proud and William the Negligent. His life, almost unknown to his hundred relatives, spanned four generations of the Astors, for he was sixteen when the Founder died in 1848, and outlived his nephew, John Jacob IV, who went down on the *Titanic*. His father, William Backhouse, died in 1875, and his two brothers in 1890 and 1892, but he attended the funeral of none of them. Skeletons were supposed to remain in their closets. Of all the Astors, it was said that none but gentle Laura Delano, his sister, and Vincent, his grand-nephew, ever visited him — the latter perhaps to see in the flesh this remnant of a long-departed generation.

Henry in his youth was a strange, tempestuous, hulking fellow, subject to violent outbursts and yet in the main lusty and good-natured. His father sequestered him on his Hudson estate of Rokeby, far from the scrutiny of inquisitive New Yorkers who might have compared the lad to his uncle, John Jacob II. There at Rokeby he lived the bucolic life, totally unconcerned with the real-estate routine that bound his brother John Jacob III to the Astor Estate or with the ambitions that made his sister-in-law, Mrs. William Astor, the leader of society.

A ruddy-faced man with a red beard, shirt opening on a mighty chest and " firm-thewed neck," he took the morning air by driving a pair of smart trotters into a lather and amused himself by organizing horse-races, boxing and wrestling with his farmer neighbours, or scattering straw on a plot in the barn-

yard and inviting his farmhands and local youth to gladiatorial contests.

Despite his rages, he was a friendly fellow. When his neighbours were in need, he lent them money at indefinite terms for indefinite periods, for he was independently wealthy, thanks to the Founder's gift, before his death, of a quarter interest in the Eden farm. At first the income was negligible, but as the years went by and New York crept up toward Forty-second Street and Broadway, the rentals mounted steadily. He never bothered about that, for his brother John Jacob III managed Henry's estate as his own and remitted quarterly cheques to the Poughkeepsie bank.

The biggest sensation of 1871 in Dutchess and neighbouring Ulster County across the Hudson was the secretive wedding of Henry and the daugher of a peasant. The lonely bachelor resident of Rokeby on May 4 ordered a Rondout livery to convey a minister and a farmer family to the Dinehart cottage, where lived a simple farmer, descendant of one of those unfortunate Rhinelanders who had been shanghaied on the docks of Hamburg, brought to America, and sold as an indentured servant to My Lord Livingston, owner of the Dutchess countryside. There Henry married Malvina Dinehart, a "handsome, blooming maiden" of twenty-seven.

Despite his efforts to keep "my complicated marriage" secret, the news seeped down to New York and reached the ears of "the governor." An anguished family council was held in the office of the Astor Estate on Prince Street, and William was dispatched with all the speed of the New York & Hudson River Railroad to inquire into the horrid tidings. William could only report that the damage was irremediable.

The Astor family quivered under the cruel blow. Mrs. William Backhouse, an Armstrong-Livingston, whose family had once been lords of that Hudson shore, felt disgraced that a son of hers should contract such a misalliance; John Jacob the Proud spat in disgust; William was still furious from the interview; Mrs. William writhed to think that the Schermerhorns and other proud old families must be snickering behind their tea cups at this blot on the Astor escutcheon.

William Backhouse, shaking with rage, sat down and wrote the ninth codicil to his will, reducing a $150,000 gift to a mere $30,000, and revoking two trust funds of $200,000. Fortunately, two years before, Henry had signed a document handing over the control of his Eden farm trust to his brothers. The income from that, said his father, would be "more than adequate for all useful purposes of himself and any family he may have in the condition of life he has chosen for himself."

Father was right. In 1873 the Eden farm was paying Henry $30,000 a year, by 1885 the income would be $60,000, and by 1890, $80,000.

Henry had not even had the common prudence to exact an ante-nuptial agreement from his bride. And so Malvina was the first woman ever to marry into the family with a dower right in her husband's property. His father congratulated himself that in any event this Dinehart woman would never be able to get her hands on the Eden farm — that was bound firmly in a life trust under the control of his other two sons. But they were so distressed that they resigned, and Charles F. Southmayd, legal watchdog of the Astor Estate, and other family factotums were installed as trustees.

The control of the Eden farm had been taken away from Henry after the scandalous affair when in a rage he had struck little Josephine Ash, the four-year-old daughter of his head farmer and companion. Ash threatened to beat Henry into a pulp and only Mrs. Ash's intervention with a boiler-cover as a shield broke up the fight.

Several years later the Ashes brought suit for twenty thousand dollars, claiming that Josephine had been injured for life. The trial in Poughkeepsie brought the charge from Astor's lawyers that extortion was the aim. Mrs. Ash was Mrs. Astor's sister-in-law: "Mr. Astor didn't do much marrying, except in form and ceremony; they married him. . . . As time rolls on, the millions and acres which Astor now owns will be swept into the same pool into which he has married."

Counsel for Ash brought strange testimony from Henry. He was accustomed, he admitted, to put on a surplice and preach. He "used to preach in the house whether any one was present

or not — did it for pastime more than anything else — had made the Bible a study." Before preaching he struck a bell with a crowbar that hung on a rope. It was at such a preaching that he was said to have assaulted the little girl. After the incident they claimed he was panic-stricken for fear "it would get to the Governor's ears and there would be hell to pay." He was accustomed to go into towering rages when drunk and admitted that "on one occasion when they went to New York I got intoxicated and locked my wife and Mr. Ash in a room."

Mrs. Astor, fashionably dressed, denied saying that "the red-eyed hound ought to be hung," and other Dineharts also testified, but the jury was asked to bear in mind that the whole family was living off Astor's wealth. Nevertheless twenty thousand dollars was awarded Ash while the courtroom applauded. A new trial was denied.

In 1874 Henry bought a two-hundred-acre estate near West Copake in the Berkshires, where he and Malvina settled down in a rambling mid-Victorian house. He had a room paved with silver dollars, and many were the tales of his idiosyncrasies. Quite regularly cheques arrived from the Astor Estate. These he would thrust into a pigeonhole, much to the distress of his trust company, which begged him to cash them or invest the money. Then suddenly he would gather a whole sheaf of the cheques and send them off. His brothers died early in the 1890's, but he lived on, becoming almost a legendary figure in Columbia County, known principally for his wife's good works and for his brother-in-law's management of his estate and farm — the show place of that German farmer community. One of his nephews, William Waldorf, deserted America for England, another went down on the *Titanic,* and still old Henry lived on.

Between 1892 and 1914 a trustees' report showed that he received $2,198,000 net from his Eden farm, and in the three years from 1914 to 1917, $760,000 clear — a sterling example of unearned increment and absentee ownership to delight the heart of an iconoclastic economist.

At last, on June 7, 1917, the event long awaited by the Astor collaterals came to pass. Henry died. His personal estate, saved from the income on his Eden farm, he left to his wife. She died

on August 4 of the same year and the two were buried in a Reformed churchyard on a hilltop overlooking the Berkshires, far, far from the imposing Astor mausoleum in Trinity Cemetery, with none but Dineharts and neighbours to witness the funeral rites. The picture had been turned to the wall in 1871; and by 1917 Henry the Forgotten meant nothing to any Astor except that they were about to share in his part of the Astor Estate.

Malvina Dinehart Astor in her will showed charity such as no Astor had ever displayed. Of her fortune, which amounted perhaps to a million dollars, $100,000 was given to the Hudson City Hospital and $25,000 to the Home for the Aged. The West Copake Reformed Church was given $10,000 as a memorial to her husband, and $9,500 went to six employees. The rest went to the Dineharts in $100,000 trusts and in $25,000 gifts, $10,000 gifts, and smaller sums until all of her brothers and sisters and nephews and nieces, including those who had wandered off from Columbia County, had been remembered.

Her fortune represented the surplus of income from the Eden farm that Henry Astor found it impossible to spend. Each quarter in his final senile years he had received a cheque for more than $50,000 from the estate. The money came from rentals of land on which stood the Astor, Bijou, and Morosco Theatres, sixty brownstones, thirty-eight tenements with stores, thirty-three parcels under lease, seven factory buildings, and six vacant lots. Among his properties were some of the dreariest, shabbiest tenements along Eighth and Ninth Avenues, inhabited by poverty-stricken Irish day labourers who could ill afford to pay the rents for which Henry had no use. At 689–701 Tenth Avenue was a dumbbell tenament built 81 feet 9 inches deep on a hundred-foot lot; 518 West Forty-eighth Street was not even dumbbelled to give interior rooms the solace of an air well. It extended 95 feet, backing against another tenement which stood 83 feet deep on its lot. In the basement at 489 Eighth Avenue an ice-cream and candy plant worked at full blast. Many of the respectable old brownstones had been carved into tenements for the transient trade. Good or bad, they poured their rentals into the Astor Estate. The income from 304 West Forty-sixth Street was $1,600 a year; at 650–652 Tenth Avenue two stores rented

at $600 and $876, and $2,904 could be expected from the eight seven-room apartments. Ground rent of $425 was paid on 503 West Forty-seventh Street.

Hungry heirs scanned Uncle Henry's property list, for it was all to be put up at auction in accordance with the trust, which provided that property belonging to childless Astors must be distributed among their kin, *per stirpes*. The trustees allotted 360 shares — each share worth some $14,000 — to Astorians:

William Astor Chanler	15
Winthrop Astor Chanler	15
Margaret Livingston Chanler	15
John Armstrong Chanler	15
Elizabeth Winthrop Chanler Chapman	15
Lewis Stuyvesant Chanler	15
Alida Beekman Chanler Emmet	15
Robert Winthrop Chanler	15
Helen Roosevelt Robinson	12
James Roosevelt Roosevelt, Jr.	12
Charlotte Augusta Drayton-Haig	24
William Vincent Astor	8
Ava Alice Muriel Astor	8
John Jacob Astor VI	8
Mary Van Alen Thompson	8
James Laurens Van Alen	8
Sarah Steward Van Alen Collier	8
Marshall Orme Wilson, Jr.	12
Richard Thornton Wilson	12
Hubert de Stuers	20
Margaret de Stuers Oberndorff	20
Louis Zborowski	20
Arthur Astor Carey	60

These shares took care of all the living descendants of William Backhouse Astor, through his daughters, Emily Ward and Alida Carey, and his son, William. The English Astors, descendants through John Jacob III, already enormously wealthy, waived their claim. To Vincent Astor his share was small pota-

toes indeed, but to the de Stuers-Zborowski clan Uncle Henry's death meant no less than $1,700,000 suddenly dropped into the laps of poor relations.

Apparently the heirs had been long prepared for the passing of their octogenarian uncle. Three days after his death and before he had a chance to become comfortably adjusted in his grave, suit was filed to obtain the court's blessing on the division of his estate. The sales were held in 1920 on a good market. " Most of these properties," the prospectus announced, " should make a desirable investment for income purposes together with the opportunity for speculation and a reasonably sure profit from the future increase in values. For a comparatively small sum many of the houses can be altered into one or two-room apartments and double and triple the amount of the present rental obtained." Well over $5,000,000 was obtained for Henry Astor's quarter in the Eden farm. That meant that each of the seven Chanlers plucked some $200,000 from the fruit of the Founder's wisdom in buying part of Wastrel Medcef Eden's farm in 1803 for less than $25,000.

CHAPTER *ii*

The Amazing Chanlers

DULL dogs, snorted an impatient English writer of the Astors. But novelist, psychologist, or geneticist could ask no livelier subjects than descendants of old William Backhouse through his daughter Emily and colourful Sam Ward, further enriched by the genes of John Winthrop Chanler. "There is always one Chanler in the newspapers," remarked John Jay Chapman, who married a Chanler girl. "The Chanler theme dies in the bassoons and is dropped by the pathetic drum solo — but hark the flute!" Without exception, he said, they were all "eccentrics." Whether writing sonnets in an insane asylum, circling Kilimanjaro, running guns to the Cuban rebels, sponsoring Bahaism, or painting with aluminum and gold leaf, this family renourished with wealth through the death of Uncle Henry showed the only touch of genius in the Astorian strain since the Founder.

Emily, lightest and gayest of the Astors, died in childbirth in 1841; her only surviving child, Margaret, gave birth to eleven children and then died suddenly in 1874. Herself an orphan, she left ten orphans, for her husband followed her soon to the grave.

Sunshine and shadow were of the lives of these orphan children. Their grandfather, Sam Ward, was born to be gay and doomed to be sad. Son of the great banker, a savant, littérateur, and something of a dilettante scientist, he ran his father's bank to the wall, was harried by the unapproving Astors, who took custody of his daughter, Margaret. He joined the Forty-Niners, returned East after many years to reign as King of the Lobby

in Washington, and spent his declining years in Italy's bright sunshine, where he died with the *Rubáiyát* and Horace under his pillow.

His daughter, Margaret Astor Ward, married John Winthrop Chanler, an aspiring young Tammany lawyer of South Carolina ancestry, fine manners, and sonorous oratory. Tammany, eager to reward those few mavericks of the aristocracy who strayed across the political tracks, sent Chanler to Congress in the war years. As a good Democrat he flayed the Republicans for attempting to enfranchise the Negro. "This is a white workingmen's government," he declaimed. "Shall the white laborer bow his free independent and honored brow to the level of the Negro just set free from slavery, and by yielding the entrance to this great citadel of our nation, surrender the mastery of his race? . . . The preservation of the Union has been committed by Providence to the National Conservative Democratic Masses of the country."

Congressman Chanler fought Tweed, suffered political reverses, lost his wife in 1875, and died himself two years later at Rokeby, which William Backhouse had given Emily. The ten children were left an estate valued at $3,000,000.

A guardians' committee was named which "sat like gods at their monthly meetings, deciding and decreeing what should happen to the Chanler children." John Armstrong was sent to Rugby, Winthrop Astor to Eton, Elizabeth to a girls' school on the Isle of Wight, and William Astor to a boys' school at Ossining. The others were left at Rokeby under the tutelage of prim Mary Marshall, an elderly cousin from South Carolina. The trustees asked the court for $60,000 a year from an income of $70,000 to maintain the children; Judge Brunt snorted that $30,000 was not only enough but erred on the side of liberality.

Life at Rokeby under sombre Mary and dull Bostwick, the tutor, was a succession of solemn hymn-singing and lecturing interspersed with volcanic upheavals that sent Bostwick slinking off and Cousin Mary to praying God that it would not all end with murder. So in an artificial home on an estate remote from social contacts, defiant of the niggling restraints of govern-

ess and tutor, the smaller Chanlers grew up, wild, tempestuous, and unloved.

John Armstrong (Archie), a bold, self-willed fellow, spent four years at St. John's Military Academy, two at Rugby, and four at Columbia, was admitted to the bar, established a partnership, but saw no reason to waste his time in practice. For a while he lived with the cowboys in New Mexico, went with General Crook among the Apaches, returned to New York to sleep o' days and prowl by night. In 1888 he became engaged to Amélie Rives, of distinguished Virginia family, whose first novel, *The Quick or the Dead,* had just scandalized all proper Victorians. It was a book designed to bring a blush to the fairest cheek while breaking none of the Commandments, and all the worse because an unmarried authoress presumed to write of kisses, of a heroine who sat on the floor with her tear-wet cheeks resting on her lover's rough-tweeded knees without a chaperon present. One dreadful episode revealed the lovers sliding down a haystack together. And her hero, Jack Dering, was indeed John Armstrong Chanler to the life — " the same curly brown hair above a square, strong-modeled forehead; eyes the color of autumn pools in sunlight . . . the fine jaw which has the curve from ear to tip like the prow of a cutter." " The quicker Miss Rives becomes Mrs. Chanler," observed one guardian of the public morals, " the better it will be for both of them."

The wedding was held, romantically as Amélie would have it, at Castle Hill, the family home in Albemarle County, Virginia, in June 1888.

It was not to be expected that so simple a matter could be arranged without offense to his turbulent family. The news of the wedding reached Rokeby via the New York papers. And Aunt Lina (*the* Mrs. Astor) was visiting the Chanlers there! Alida cried her eyes out. Wintie was mad as a hornet about his older brother's " sublime and fatuous predilection for mystery. . . . In the most important epoch of his life he has made a fool of himself and hurt his wife in the eyes of the public." He then wrote his brother sarcastically that he would find it cool at Rokeby despite the summer heat. Archie shot back: " I shall

want an apology from you in writing before anything further can pass between us." Earlier fist-fights had by now given way to encounters worthy of the descendants of South Carolina gentlemen. Nevertheless peace was restored.

The newly-weds swept on to England, where Amélie became the toast of London, with Thomas Hardy, Henry James, George Meredith, Lord Curzon, Oscar Wilde enchanted with her beauty and freshness. Both Society and Bohemia delighted to pay her court, while the proud Chanler formed a part of the background. He could not brook his wife's fame. Returning to New York in 1890, he complained that Amélie was so "indolent" that she would not give up literature, in which she lacked creative force, for portrait-painting, in which, he swore, she had unequalled talent. Several years later she got a South Dakota divorce.

Amélie behind him, young Chanler now burned with an idea indorsed by Bartholdi to establish the Chanler Concours, a series of small prizes for unrecognized American artists leading to a scholarship in Paris good for five years of study. Putting in $13,000 of his own money, he then proceeded to persuade his Astorian kins to contribute. They must have regarded their young relative as slightly mad. Nevertheless William Astor put in $2,500, William Waldorf $1,500, and Aunt Laura Astor Delano, $1,000. At a dinner in Boston he made a sporting proposition to his cousin Henry Astor Carey that the first to die would leave $25,000 to the fund. Carey died a few years later and became the biggest donor. Cornelius Vanderbilt gave $2,500 — the only outsider to be persuaded. The Chanler Concours finally amounted to $52,000, by his reckoning, and became a factor in helping many promising young Americans to study in Paris.

In love with Virginia if not with Amélie, Chanler bought the old estate of Merry Mills not far from Castle Hill, promoted the United Industrial Company and the Roanoke Rapids Power Company in North Carolina, and then began to study "esoteric Buddhism." He suspected he enjoyed some deep psychic power. The violent quarrels of his youth were repeated now in board meetings of the industrial companies in which he had interested his brothers. They were beginning to say that he was "crazy."

He chanced to be on the same train going south with his brother William Astor. In the day's paper there was something about Bill's horse that reflected on the owner's honour. Such a statement should not go unchallenged, Archie said. Bill seemed to indicate that the charges were true. Archie asked him not to smile about a matter involving a gentleman's honour, and a furious quarrel ensued.

Some time later Archie was persuaded to give a power of attorney to his friend Stanford White. White wrote him in 1897 asking permission to visit Merry Mills. Chanler declined, but White came anyway and urged him to go to New York to "plunge into the metropolitan whirl." They went north with a physician, introduced as an old friend of White's. In New York other physicians appeared. One asked Chanler to perform his "Napoleon trance." This he did with the aid of a mirror held rigidly above his head.

To friends it was explained that Archie had gone to Europe; actually he was sent to Bloomingdale asylum. There he was lodged in a two-room apartment with a keeper ever by his side. His brothers took over the administration of his estate, which by then amounted to a million dollars.

If John Armstrong's marriage in 1888 had caused bitterness in Rokeby, it was as nothing to the storm which broke over Winthrop Astor Chanler when he brought home a Catholic bride straight from Rome. To be sure, Margaret Terry was an American, related to the Chanlers through Sam Ward, her uncle, their grandfather. In 1880 she met Wintie, "a most entirely charming boy just back from Eton, preparing for Harvard"; four years later he was staying with the Terrys in Rome. Marriage followed in 1886 despite triple obstacles: no weddings could be solemnized before Advent; they were cousins; and he was not a Catholic. But the Terrys had influence at the Papal court, which was not adverse to having wealthy American Catholics indebted to Rome at a time when anti-Catholic sentiment was rife in the United States.

When the Wintie Chanlers arrived at Rokeby, brothers and sisters made a desperate effort to be nice. Cousin Mary ruled

that Daisy's name must never be mentioned; when her first child was baptized a Catholic, Wintie's sister Margaret said it were better that the child die in its innocence. She would not sit in the family circle if the baby was there, but privately she kissed it.

While the family was at Newport, the newest Mrs. Chanler rearranged stuffy old Rokeby. The drawing-room, a funereal parlour filled with three generations of knick-knacks, was cleaned out, rearranged in the Roman style; and the hitherto closed French doors opened out on the lawn, with its view of the Hudson and the Catskills. One of the sisters, on returning, refused to enter the room, once so sacred to the memory of Great-grandmother Margaret Armstrong, Grandmother Emily Astor, and Mother Margaret Astor.

The Wintie Chanlers went to Washington to see if it savoured of the cosmopolitan life of Rome, but they discovered that America had no place for charming idlers, and departed for Italy.

Back in New York in the late 1890's, they found a fine *fin de siècle* period presided over by Stanford White, the link between "Philistia Felix and Bohemia." "A kind, gay pagan," said Catholic Mrs. Chanler.

When the Spanish-American War broke out, William Astor Chanler chartered a boat and got a crew to run ammunition to the Cubans. Theodore Roosevelt, who had just resigned as Assistant Secretary of the Navy to organize the Rough Riders, invited Bill and Wintie to join him. "I really think he is going mad," Wintie wrote his wife in Rome. "Theodore is wild to fight and hack and hew." His political career was at an end, Wintie prophesied.

William Astor Chanler joined the horseless Rough Riders and asked his brother Winthrop Astor to take over the gun-running expedition. Wintie landed on a forlorn bit of the Cuban coast, unaware of a masked battery that splashed bullets around them, killing one and wounding many, including Wintie. The next day the gun-runners established contact with General Gomez,

landed their munitions. Wintie was made a colonel in the Cuban Army and returned to New York to recuperate.

Mrs. Wintie from Rome reported that many Americans there were alarmed for the fate of their country and their own remittances; others were openly disloyal. Actually, as Admiral Davis put it, the war "seemed like treading on a cockroach"; or as McKinley, swamped with volunteers, complained: "There are not enough Spaniards to go round."

Colonel Winthrop Astor Chanler retired to Europe, to hunt in Ireland, England, Scotland, the Tyrol, the Campagna, Sicily.

Hunting became life's only passion for Wintie and his younger brother, William Astor. As soon as Bill reached twenty-one, he quit Harvard and threw all the money he could lay his hands on into an expedition to explore Kilimanjaro and the Masai country in British East Africa, where Stanley had said it was not safe to go with a thousand rifles. Gaining experience by that incursion into Darkest Africa and having shaken off the jungle fever, Bill returned to Zanzibar in 1892 to head the biggest American expedition ever launched into the jungle and desert of that part of the unknown continent. His safari numbered no fewer than 130 porters, 7 Somali guides, 12 Sudanese soldiers, 14 camels, 50 donkeys, 10 oxen. Chanler Falls was discovered and named on the Guaso Nyiro River, 10 lives were lost in the pestilential Lorian Swamp, 12 men were wounded in a running battle with the Wamsara, mutiny broke out among his porters. After two years in the wilderness, he was forced to turn back. Responsibility for the failure of the expedition Chanler laid on General Sir Lloyd Matthews, Prime Minister to the Sultan of Zanzibar, who was not happy to have Americans prowling about territory claimed by the British. British officials along the coast, he complained, were "arabized" and had helped his deserting porters instead of jailing them. On the credit side was the exploration of vast territories north and northeast of Mount Kenya, a victory over the Wamsara, and a treaty with the fierce Embe.

Experience taught Chanler that soldiers, not missionaries, must be the pioneers. The natives must first be convinced of the

Europeans' superiority, then of the advantages of trading. "The native must first of all be taught to work a little harder than is absolutely necessary in order to support life; this fills the native with an interest in his future life upon this earth. Then and not until then is he ripe for religious instruction."

Among the scientific discoveries classified by the Smithsonian Institution were the new antelope, *Cervicapra chanleri*, five new reptiles, a new species of insect, and numerous specimens of bugs, many of which received identifying names of "chanleri" and one "astoria."

Back in New York in 1895, William Astor Chanler was fêted by the Boone and Crockett Club at a dinner described by Roosevelt as "one of the pleasantest I ever went to." Harvard, which he had quit as a sophomore, gave him an honorary master's degree, and the Royal Geographic Society of London and the Imperial and Royal Geographic Society of Vienna hastened to enroll him as an honorary member.

Joining Tammany in the tradition of his father, he became an Assemblyman; on the outbreak of the Spanish-American War he organized the buccaneering expedition to Cuba which his older brother Wintie took over, was made an assistant adjutant general on the staff of General Wheeler, served in the Santiago campaign, returned to be boosted into Congress, found stalking political game in Washington too tame, and gave up public life.

The incredible tales of hardship, bravery, and cool leadership embodied in his *Through Jungle and Desert: Travels in Eastern Africa*, and his own fame as a raconteur who loved the fantastic tale based on fact, the improbable prediction that came true, led his brother-in-law John Jay Chapman to write:

He is telling the laws of the Boogla-Goo,
  The secret clique that runs Bombay.
He himself was the chief, they say,
  The very Pyjam of the How-do-you-do
That poisoned the Princess of Cathay
  And won the bride and rode the ride
And ran the race that turned the tide
  Of Mongols in Baffin's Bay.

He talked till the brains of the men that night
  Like absinthe mixed with dynamite,
Gave off blue sparks and the lamps burned low,
  And still the murmur about doth go:
" Did he do it, and is it so?
  We don't know and he don't know
    If it be false or if it be true."

In 1903 Colonel Chanler amazed his sisters by marrying an actress, beautiful Minnie Ashley, leading lady of *Wang*, *The Country Girl*, and *San Toy*, herself but recently divorced from an actor. To them that seemed even worse than John Armstrong's marriage to Amélie Rives, the virgin authoress of *The Quick or the Dead*, or Winthrop Astor's marriage to a Catholic straight out of Rome.

As out of sympathy with America as Wintie, Bill moved to Paris, where he boasted a fine stable, took pleasure in the hunt, and hobnobbed with explorers. He was in the campaign that saw the brave resistance of the Senussi tribesmen to the conquering Italians in Libya, and later suffered a severe leg injury in some kind of Parisian brawl in which Jack Johnson and Willie Lewis, the prizefighters, were mixed up. During the World War he became, like some of his brothers and sisters, an ardent anti-Semite, holding that the Jews started the mess and even ran the Pope in Rome. He satisfied his martial propensities by joining the U. S. Naval Intelligence Service. Bill died in Mentone in 1934, leaving a quarter-million-dollar estate to his widow and two sons, William Astor, Jr., and Sidney Ashley.

William Astor Chanler, Jr., followed his father's example by joining the Waldeck expedition into British Guiana to search for Paul Redfern, the aviator lost there in 1927. He, too, was deserted by his porters, and the expedition straggled into Georgetown piecemeal, young Chanler desperately ill.

His brother, Sidney Ashley, distinguished himself in 1934 by marrying Princess Maria-Antoinette Michelle Raphaelle Gabrielle Adelaide Françoise Xaviere Josephe Expedite Gregoire de Bragança, daughter of the late Duke Miguel, pretender

to the throne of Portugal, at the Castle of Seebenstein in Austria, where the Bragança lived.

Over the turbulent orphan family of the Chanlers, as they grew up, reigned "Queen" Elizabeth, of whom Sargent said that she had the face of the Sistine Madonna and the eyes of the Child. She and her two sisters had been brought up at Rokeby under Cousin Mary's harsh but ineffective regime and had been "finished" in England. Almost literally they knew no one in New York, where they must seek husbands fitting their station in life. So Aunt Lina (*the* Mrs. Astor) and no fewer than a dozen other great ladies, also aunts, hovered over them, ridding them of their dowdy clothes, their awkward manners, and their jerky dancing, preening them to be ladies of style, introducing them to society.

Elizabeth was married in 1894 to John Jay Chapman, a young man out of Harvard passionately devoted to civic reform, president of the Good Government Club (which Roosevelt found it needful to attack as a "lunatic fringe"). Having thrashed a fellow over a fancied insult to a girl he was courting in Boston, Chapman, overcome by remorse, thrust his offending hand deep into the coals until nothing but charred knuckles and finger bones were left. The hand was amputated. Chapman and Elizabeth settled on a portion of Rokeby which they named Sylvania and passed much time in Europe.

John Armstrong Chanler furnished the metropolitan press with a nine-day sensation when he "escaped" from Bloomingdale asylum on Thanksgiving Eve of 1900 by simply extending a usual walk. From time to time when a dead tramp was fished out of some suburban pond, the mystery of the missing Chanler was revived. He turned up voluntarily at a Philadelphia hospital, was checked out as sane, and resumed his solitary way of life at Merry Mills in Virginia, where he obtained from the court a certificate of sanity, backed by such eminent authorities as Dr. H. C. Wood of the University of Pennsylvania, Professor Joseph Jastrow of Wisconsin, president of the American Psychological Association, and William James of Harvard, who

pronounced him sound of mind, but urged restraint in his psychological experiments.

At Bloomingdale this Chanler had acquired the gift of automatic writing, at first coarse, blasphemous stuff, which later turned into a Florentine romance of the time of Machiavelli (another Astor had also written, not automatically, of the licentious times of the Italian Renaissance). Poetry also was an art that came to him in Bloomingdale, and he turned out several hundred sonnets.

Brooding at Merry Mills with only a fierce parrot and a rose-breasted cockatoo for companions, he resolved to rid himself of the name so disgraced by his brothers, and thenceforth signed himself Chaloner. "I have the temperament," he wrote, "which makes it possible for me to stay angry for life." He organized the Palmetto Press, that his anger might be heard, and wrote *Four Years behind the Bars at 'Bloomingdale,' or The Bankruptcy Law in New York.* "One may search fiction high and low for a case like this in real life," commented the New York *World.* "It is one of the most remarkable stories of modern times. Here is a man of independent means, a man of affairs, a brilliant writer, an ardent sportsman and clever raconteur, sent to Bloomingdale, adjudged hopelessly insane, 'progressive,' the physicians called his case." Law journals praised the book as a stimulus to reform of the lunacy laws.

His anger flashed out in *Scorpio* No. 1, a quarterly bound in purple with a seven-tailed whip in gold and red, the title page adorned with a quotation from Tacitus: "Keenest is the hatred of kin." *Scorpio* aimed "at the strength of Juvenal, the keenness of Voltaire, the fierceness of Swift, and the form of Byron." Chaloner had material enough on the "dishonesty, hypocrisy and crimes of the Rich" to run *Scorpio* for years. Of his brothers and sisters he wrote:

> Yet these lovely ladies left me to dry-rot,
> Linger and perish in a noisome cell;
> And yet these warlike brothers blood forgot
> And doomed me untried to a living Hell!

Three ladies and four gentlemen's the roll,
Their record's knell do I now sternly toll.

His estate was now in charge of a "committee." Having tried in vain to get his allowance raised from $17,000 to $32,000 a year, in revenge he published his will, giving all to charity. That may well have impressed his brothers as another proof of insanity. He needed the money, he said, to advertise *Scorpio,* without which it could never reach the attention of the public. "Your petitioner," he pleaded, "would greatly like to cultivate his newly discovered talent of shooting folly as it flies, in correctly built sonnets."

In 1913 he took a town house in Richmond and discovered that rich hell-hounds were taking the daughters of the poor out joyriding, wrote more sonnets against New Yorkers unable to pronounce "r," against the split skirt and the brutality used on English suffragettes, and a canto addressed to the cockroaches at Bloomingdale which defended him against the bedbugs. It was about this time that in a trance he received a message from Thomas Jefferson Miller, a late Confederate officer, who described Satan as resembling Napoleon and ruling in a throne room made of rubies the size of bricks, mortared by diamonds. The frontispiece of his latest book showed Chaloner under a Napoleonic hat.

By 1915 the famous character who was sane in Virginia and insane in New York was shown in court to have an estate of $1,473,000, with an income of $89,000, of which he was allowed $24,000. The newspapers reported that he had abandoned his carriage, in which he used to drive with a shotgun over his knees to use on motorists who scared his horse, for a "jitney." He had published a play, *Robbery under the Law, or The Battle of the Millionaires,* and *The Hazard of the Die,* and promised a "chain of plays that equals Shakespeare's length." In his *Hell and the Infernal Comedy* he explained that he still rejected spiritualism, but believed in necromancy as practised by "my fair predecessor, the Witch of Endor."

Trained for the law, Chaloner was often in the courts. In 1908 *Town Topics* linked his name with his former wife, Amélie

Rives, now Countess Pierre Troubetskoy, and was promptly sued for libel.

In March 1909 Chaloner shot and killed John Gillard, whose wife had fled to Merry Mills for protection from his drunken rage. He was never arrested, as the case was held to be justifiable homicide, exercised, as Chaloner put it, by one "practicing Christianity . . . in these weak-kneed chocolate-eclair-spined times." The *New York Evening Post*, during the Harry K. Thaw episode, ran a paragraph saying: "The latest prominent assassin had the rare foresight to have himself declared insane before he shot his man." Chaloner sued and got $17,500. The *Washington Post* carried a purely factual story of the shooting; Chaloner sued and was upheld with a one-cent award.

Time and again the man who was still insane in New York tried to get himself adjudged sane. Joseph H. Choate, attorney for his "committee," declared his only sign of sanity was engaging a lawyer. In his own defence Chaloner could cite a letter he had published in the *New York Herald* of August 6, 1914, predicting that the war would last three years, that the German fleet would be sunk or captured, that permanent peace would ensue with Hungary independent and Serbia greatly enlarged. In 1919 he won the long fight for judicial confirmation of his sanity and returned to New York, an aging man of fifty-seven. He wandered about friendless, delivered a lecture at Christ Church on his "X-faculty," and revealed "the secret which has heretofore baffled humanity — the mystery of the mind of mankind." It turned out to be Confucius' Golden Rule. In the winter of 1920–1 he gave free lectures at the Cort Theatre, attended by few, and in 1924 published a defence of religious fundamentalism dedicated to Bishop Manning.

But he preferred the solitude of Merry Mills, where his servants all departed the house at sundown to let him wrestle alone with the spirits of darkness, protected only by his dogs. There he died, a lonely, embittered old man.

The fourth of the turbulent Chanler boys, Lewis Stuyvesant, went to Ireland and threw himself passionately into the Parnell movement for freedom, returned to New York and found him-

self, a blueblood of the bluebloods, the darling of Irish Tammany. As such he was nominated for lieutenant governor in 1906 on the ticket headed by William Randolph Hearst. Tammany "cut" Hearst and threw the governorship to that St. George of the Insurance dragon, Charles Evans Hughes, but Chanler was elected with the rest of the ticket. Immediately he began to dream soaring dreams worthy, in a way, of the Founder. As a lowly fur merchant, the first Astor had dreamed of a great fur monopoly; his descendant, a lowly lieutenant governor, began to dream of following Theodore Roosevelt to the White House. The cash nexus that linked this dream to reality was $10,000 to $15,000 with which Bill Manning, a publicity man, would launch a Presidential boom. Chanler called in his more experienced brother, former Congressman William Astor Chanler. He too became convinced that his brother was the man to head off Bryan's dangerous candidacy and win the Democratic nomination. Some $16,000 was paid Manning, and Chanler received a sheaf of complimentary clippings. Alas for dreams! The boomlet died aborning and Manning sued for another $20,000.

Chanler's feelings were assuaged by a Democratic nomination for governor in 1908. His opponent was Governor Hughes, who "with the unctuous self-righteousness for which above every other quality he has become well known . . . has tried to inject moral issues" into the campaign. His platform was "political buncombe." That availed Chanler little, and he went down to defeat, and thereafter lost interest in active politics. For a while he devoted himself to a quixotic practice of law, once defending a penniless murderer, and taking cases which appealed to him on a no-fee basis.

In 1921 Chanler married Julia Olin. She in 1928 renounced the vanities of society to ally herself with the Bahai movement. In collaboration with Mirza Ahmad Sohrab, former secretary to Abdul Baha, she organized the New History Society to preach the United States of the World, universal peace, universal language, universal religion. They then founded the Caravan to promote idealistic correspondence among the youth of all nations. In quite un-Chanlerian manner, Lewis Stuyve-

sant joined his wife's pacifist movements and condemned an Army Day parade as a glorification of war.

After years of only middling success Mrs. Chanler, a tall slender woman with bangs who wore a green blouse to symbolize green earth and peace, decided she needed a symbol for her movement, some person held in "universal esteem." And who better than the exiled Duke of Windsor? By cable he was notified that he had been nominated as "Ambassador-at-Large for Democracy and for Peace." Unfortunately within a year he was mobilized for the second Anglo-German war.

Years before the idea of World Federation had become fashionable, Mrs. Chanler was seeking a Federation of All Nations, had served as a chairman of the Women's Peace Society. Her stand was so absolute that she hoped a strike in the Chicago stockyards would never be settled because meat-eating was a bar to peace. Quick to rally to the victims of unfairness, she pleaded for the full rights of the Duchess of Windsor. "I feel," she cabled the British Prime Minister through her organization, the Friends of the Duke of Windsor, "that this is an injustice and I sympathize with victims of injustice whether they be sharecroppers in the South or former Kings."

Some of the Astor-Ward-Chanler brilliance flamed in Lewis Stuyvesant's son, William Chamberlain, who came in 1938 to head New York's largest law office as Corporation Counsel under Mayor LaGuardia.

The youngest of the Chanler boys, Robert Winthrop, found his artistic impulses under the disfavour of Cousin Mary at Rokeby. For claiming to have drawn a horse he was drummed out of the family circle for three days as an unconscionable liar. Fortunately his older brother Wintie happened home from Harvard. He asked Bob to draw a horse. Bob did it again, confounding his pessimistic governness.

Even before he was twenty-one, Bob was in Paris studying, and marrying Julia Chamberlain. The latest Mrs. Chanler, introduced to the family at Rokeby, witnessed one of the furious family quarrels, loud with oaths and pregnant with violence. She retreated to her room and began to pack. Her husband was

amazed. "But, Bob, you can't stay here after all that!" she cried. Bob laughed and the Chanler boys thought it a grand joke that Julia should have taken a friendly row so seriously.

It was Amélie Rives, Bob's sister-in-law, who insisted that he apply himself to painting. She went to his head and he developed brain fever. By 1901 Bob, then twenty-nine, was back in New York, divorced (Julia got ten thousand dollars a year), dejected, spiritless. Recovering, he bought an estate near Rokeby, settled down as a Dutchess County gentleman farmer, became the life of the countryside, and regaled poets and peasants at Gargantuan *fêtes champêtres.* Yielding to the Chanlerian passion for politics, he ran for sheriff of Dutchess County, was said to have spent twenty thousand dollars in an uproarious campaign, and was of course elected. He cleaned out the jail in Poughkeepsie, was an exemplary sheriff, went to Albany as a legislator, and became famous as a raconteur both in the great houses along the Hudson and at farmers' barbecues.

Then the candlelight of Paris beckoned once again to this moth of a Chanler and he fell into the toils of Lina Cavalieri. For "one week of joy and terror" he lived with Lina, who demanded he sign over his entire fortune to her. Having gone through the fortune of Prince Bariatinsky in a great apartment, the glamorous siren with sugar-of-lead complexion and bistred eyes began to do the same with Chanler's. When he asked for pocket money she told him to "work for your living like other American husbands." A friend lent him fare to escape to America, where to his relief he found that his trustees — his older brothers — refused to recognize his deed of gift to Lina. She was forced to be satisfied with only a part of Bob's million and a divorce.

To his oldest brother, John Armstrong, insane in New York and sane in Virginia, the episode offered sweet revenge. With a flash of inspiration he wired Bob: "Who's loony now?" and the whole world laughed with him. The expression passed into popular usage, much to Chaloner's delight and the discomfiture of the proud Chanlers.

Boycotted by his family, the laughing-stock of New York, Bob seemed crushed. But with true Chanlerian buoyancy he came to the surface again and began to paint furiously in a bizarre manner that achieved effects as outlandish as his oldest brother's automatic writings. Gaudy peacocks, antelopes such as never loped through Africa, giraffes that ate oranges from white birch trees, screens and panels of birds and beasts and deep-sea monsters, embellished with gold and silver leaf, began to excite the fancy of New Yorkers on the scout for the new and unexpected. Society took up the fad he had created. He bought two houses on East Nineteenth Street and threw them together into the "House of Fantasy." The walls along the staircase were adorned with monkeys and beasts of the jungle, a room was kept full of live tropical birds, macaws roamed the dining-room, aquariums of goldfish lined the windows. His house became a centre of Bohemia. The revels lasted often for entire days and nights. Strange stories floated around of the doings at the "House of Fantasy," but Bob merely said: "Some people with money do not know how to make people happy with it. They think that giving away something is all that is necessary. . . . They do not give themselves."

Bob's paintings, murals, screens, and panels went into New York's finest homes, and the French government bought one mural for the Luxembourg. He developed his themes on velvet, silk, wood, plaster, and paper, with metallic underlays, risings in gold, silver, and aluminum, and many a novel medium. Amid the oddities of the House of Mirth democracy became for him "the demonology for an aspiring individual" which with its "machines, money and majority rule had exterminated all the metaphysical, the poetic and romantic from our mental horizon and substituted for them a rationalistic real politik."

After an accident lamed him (his brother William Astor in Paris lost a leg) he grew fat and philosophic, closed the House of Fantasy, and retired to Woodstock, a "Parsifal-Bacchus" turned into "an Oriental sage," as his sister-in-law Mrs. Winthrop Astor Chanler put it. In 1927 he was reported engaged to marry Isadora Duncan, the day before her death in an auto

accident. He died in 1930, leaving trust funds totalling $465,000 to his two daughters.

Something of the adventuring spirit of her brothers was in Margaret Livingston Chanler. With two brothers in the Spanish-American War, she went to Cuba and Puerto Rico, established base hospitals, then went to China during the Boxer Rebellion and received a gold medal from Congress. Later she became president of the New York Women's Municipal League and married Richard Aldrich, the distinguished music critic for the *Times*. In the division of the Chanler Estate, she received Rokeby, on whose tapestry-covered lawn her sister Alida Beekman had been married to C. Temple Emmet. Under Stanford White's expert management, that wedding was as memorable as any ever held on the seigneuries of the Hudson, what with troubadours singing in the moonlight.

" Queen " Elizabeth, the oldest sister, who had married John Jay Chapman, lived at near-by Sylvania. At a time when Chapman was writing a biography of William Lloyd Garrison, a Negro was burned alive by a mob at Coatesville, Pennsylvania. On the anniversary Chapman hired a hall in Coatesville and delivered a powerful address in the Garrison style, heard only by a few reporters.

When war broke out in 1914, Chapman was all for the Americans taking part, " but they must get into the game by spilling their blood." His son joined the LaFayette Esquadrille and became one of the sacrifices demanded by his father. Later he became fanatical against Jews and Catholics, ran a clubroom in Hell's Kitchen for young people, railed against Big Business influences at Harvard. A gentleman of fine manners, almost dandyish in his clothes, with Jovian beard and brow, Chapman has been described as perhaps the best letter-writer America has ever produced. In their last years the Chapmans lived in Charleston, South Carolina, ancient home of the Chanlers.

Between wars Winthrop Astor Chanler gave his life to foxes and horses. To his pious Catholic wife it seemed that the air was full of horses, for breakfast, lunch, tea, dinner, and even by

moonlight. The earthquake at Messina provided an interlude, with Wintie working heroically digging people from the ruins, directing reconstruction and sanitary work and winning the Corona d'Italia. The outbreak of the World War gave him an autumn taste of blood. Observing the first American contingents to arrive in France, he said they needed "to be blooded." He became a censor and greeter in Paris, was honoured by election to the Jockey Club, became an aide to General Pershing, and then because of his knowledge of Italian was attached to the American military mission to Italy. He received an Italian military medal.

After the war Chanler returned to foxes and proposed to sell his upstate home where his wife had her private chapel because the hunt club had been disbanded. Mrs. Chanler demurred. "After all," she said, hunting "is not the only thing in the world."

"Well, but you see for me it is," he answered simply.

Mrs. Chanler, resourceful woman, saw to it that the Genesee Valley Hunt was reorganized, with Wintie as master of the hounds. In 1927 Chanler suffered a fall from his horse and did not regain consciousness. His wife, who had never been able to convert Wintie, had him baptized *sub conditione.*

And so ended the story of the second-generation Chanlers, fifth-generation Astors in all but name, as brilliant, adventuresome, gallant, and erratic a band of brothers as ever figured in the pages of American history. In them was blended the wit and charm of their grandfather, old Sam Ward, epicure and connoisseur, the bravery and punctilio of their father, John Winthrop Chanler, the blood of the Stuyvesants, and the money of the Astors. Sharpened in combativeness and bigotry by Cousin Mary's brittle despotism at Rokeby, they had flown straightway on reaching twenty-one and command of a million dollars each, toward their ambition — Paris, the arts, actresses, the wilds of Africa, war. No finer specimens of the blooded, moneyed aristocracy adorned that period of the turn of the century. Each in his way was a classic exhibit of energetic idleness, of high spirits with nothing really important to do,

of talents twisted by John Armstrong into fantastic journeys to hell, by Winthrop Astor and William Astor into fantastic horse-worship, by Lewis Stuyvesant into fantastic questings for the universal, by Robert Winthrop into fantastic artistry. One and all they lived their later years in a world created by themselves, for themselves, through virtue of the Astor millions.

CHAPTER *iii*

Flotsam, Jetsam

In the House of Astor a Chanler, Carey, Bristed, or Langdon could claim as much of the Founder's blood as any scion bearing the proud name of John Jacob Astor. If his wealth did not rank with an Astor's, that was due to his misfortune in tracing descent through a daughter.

Few descendants of collateral branches emulated the Chanlers by lifting themselves above the run of the country's fast-growing leisured class. Charles Astor Bristed, a favourite grandson of the Founder and inheritor of his Hellgate country estate, sold those potentially precious acres to a Catholic convent. Sixty years later Vincent Astor found himself obliged to buy back scraps of the Founder's country refuge, paying as much per front foot as old John Jacob had paid per acre.

Bristed, who inherited some of the belligerency of his mother, Magdalen, that Amazonian among women, and some of the literary aptitude of his scholar-preacher father, became a sharp controversialist and pamphleteer who defended the civilized minority against the uncouth mob. He so wounded the feelings of a French gentleman in a literary quarrel that only a duel could assuage the indignity. After a harmless round of shots the two were forced by their seconds into the bushes, from which they blazed away in high dudgeon and perfect safety.

The Founder's second daughter, the formidable Dorothea, bore eight children. One became Baroness Boreel and mother of Baroness van Pallandt and Baroness Groeninx van Zoelen. The Baroness Boreel lived to see her name placed on the first

big office structure on Broadway, famous in its day for possessing the city's first elevator.

Another daughter of Dorothea married Matthew Wilks, an English gentleman, and bore Matthew Astor Wilks, who suffered from the gout in some of the finest clubs of New York. At the age of sixty-five, still a bachelor, he fell in love with Harriet Sylvia Ann Howland Green, daughter of Hetty Green.

Never was an only daughter guarded so zealously. Hetty was even given to writing warnings to Sylvia in the newspapers; in 1894 the *Tribune* carried her message that a certain banker's son in Newport "knows just enough to part his hair in the middle and spend his father's money." Highly indignant when Széchényi made away with five million dollars and Gladys Vanderbilt, Hetty set an even stricter watch over her daughter. The Countess Annie Leary became concerned and lured Hetty and her Sylvia out of their Hoboken flat into a suite at the Plaza. Sylvia was given facials at three hundred dollars a facial and a formal dinner at the Plaza on the Leary gold plate, all to smooth the way for Matthew Astor Wilks's suit. The engagement was announced in 1909, only to be denied immediately by Hetty. A meeting of the principals was held in the vault of the National Park Bank, where, in return for five thousand dollars in Hetty's will, Wilks waived all claim to the Green fortune. But Hetty told the press:

"I intend to see that my daughter makes no mistake. I have not yet given my consent to her marriage. I have heard him talk but I have heard other beaux of Sylvia's talk. What I have seen of him is all right. Mr. Wilks comes of fine stock. His mother was a Langdon. I am not afraid for my daughter, but I want to know Mr. Wilks better. That is the whole truth."

Wilks won. His own income of probably twenty thousand dollars a year and his age seemed guarantees that he had no serious designs on the Green fortune.

Hetty died in 1916, leaving half her fortune to Mrs. Matthew Astor Wilks. Wilks himself died in 1926, leaving all his fortune to her. In 1936 Colonel Green died, ignored his wife in his will, and left all to his sister, who thereby became the wealthiest woman in the United States. Childless and a recluse, she lived

on in an eleven-thousand-dollar-a-year apartment on Fifth Avenue, awaiting death without ever having known life, a strange parallel to the Wendel sisters.

The third of buxom Dorothea's daughters mothered the leading dandies of the 1890's, the Kane brothers. De Lancey Astor Kane became famous as owner of the Tally-Ho, which revived coaching in New York. With his brother, Samuel Nicholson, he was a founder of the Coaching Club, and for a time ran a coach between the Brunswick Hotel, the sportsmen's centre, and the Westchester Country Club. He married Eleanora F. Iselin, of the banking family, and turned Catholic.

Samuel Nicholson, a graduate of Annapolis, was a man of yachts, a commodore of the New York Yacht Club, the guest of the King at Cowes. He never married, and died in 1906 at the end of a long and carefree life unsullied by toil.

Another brother, Woodbury Kane, was famous among the "Ten Dudes" of the early 1890's who set the fashions along Fifth Avenue and in Newport. His cousin by marriage, Mrs. Winthrop Astor Chanler, observed that he was better known than the Secretary of State or the Speaker of the House. A member of Roosevelt's Rough Riders, he later distinguished himself in cricket in England and India, boosted Aiken, South Carolina, and died in 1905 after marrying Sallie Hargous Elliott, a sparkling beauty.

Emily Astor Kane, the sister of these dandies, in the most brilliant wedding of 1876 was married to Peter Augustus Jay, scion of the proud old Federalist family, Harvard honour man and diplomat on the make. The wedding was held at St. James's, Hyde Park, with the Astors, Kanes, Langdons, and Jays out in full force.

Mme de Stuers, the only glittering offshoot of the Astor-Carey family tree, distinguished herself by being the first Astor to dare a divorce. She had been married to Alphonse Lambert Eugene, Chevalier de Stuers, Dutch envoy to Paris. Burning charges were scorched into legal documents at Sioux Falls, South Dakota, the Reno of the Gay Nineties. She charged the Chevalier had tried to put her in an asylum and had complained she was extravagant with her own money. He responded gal-

lantly that she had taken a trip to India on "Count" Zborowski's yacht and wanted to marry him. *Town Topics* wagged its waggish head and said that while people in the Four Hundred were not very attractive, learned, or accomplished, at least they could try to be virtuous.

Mme de Stuers, who was always a Baroness to the American press, won her suit amid many lurid details of her flight from Paris. As predicted, she married Elliott Zborowski, who claimed he was a count by virtue of his descent from John Sobieski, John III of Poland, saviour of Vienna from the Turks. There was no doubt that his father was Martin Zabriskie, of an old New Jersey family that had married into a slice of the Morris of Morrisania estate.

Another shoot off the Founder's tree, Louise Astor Van Alen, married the Georgian madcap Prince, Alexis Mdivani. A year later she divorced Prince Alexis, who passed on to richer conquests by marrying Barbara Hutton, the five-and-dime heiress. But Louise had not seen enough of the merry Georgians, so she married Prince Serge Mdivani, one-time husband of Pola Negri and just divorced from Mary McCormic.

Charlotte Augusta Drayton, who had brought such anguish to her mother, *the* Mrs. Astor, through the international Drayton-Borrowe scandal, married George Ogilvy Haig, the whisky-distiller. Her daughter, Caroline Astor Drayton, was married to William Phillips, fast-rising star of American diplomacy.

Thanks to the Founder's shrewdness in buying mid-Manhattan farms, scores of his descendants through the distaff side lived genteel lives, relieved of toil. Many counted themselves millionaires, but none inherited the Founder's knack of breeding dollars. They were content to accept the bounty dropped in their laps, and considered their duty done if the bounty was guarded against dissipation.

Few of old John Jacob Astor's positive business virtues passed on to his descendants, but at any rate it could be said that few scattered their heritage either in vicious rioting, in injudicious speculation, or in too open-hearted charity. If one head of the House was to describe himself as a "very regular American," that certainly was true of most of his cousins; stripped of their

patrimony and of the fine manners they cherished as members of the landed aristocracy, they would have been indistinguishable from the ruck of their fellow citizens. Lots and houses, office buildings and tenements could be handed down from one generation to another, but not the genius of the Founder.

Nevertheless it was remarkable that so few of his descendants found any incentive to increase their wealth by their own efforts. Perhaps as members of the American aristocracy they believed their main contribution to society was to preserve the values of a leisured class not concerned with the market place or with the sordid pursuit of wealth that characterized so many of their neighbours. They had found security on some fragment of the many acres of their great ancestor, and they had no desire to tempt Providence. What they wanted most of all was a society as static as their land.

BOOK SEVEN

VINCENT ASTOR

CHAPTER *i*

From Reform to France

ONLY twenty years old when the cold waters of the Atlantic claimed his father, Vincent Astor was the youngest of his House ever to succeed to the regency. When William Backhouse took over the Astor Estate he was fifty-six; William Astor succeeded at the age of forty-five; John Jacob IV at twenty-eight. Was the tough-fibred stock of the Founder, who had lived to be eighty-four, softening?

Vincent, only son of an only son, was a narrow-chested, slope-shouldered, gangling lad, six feet four, who had been sheltered for years of his youth in the Swiss mountains against dreaded tuberculosis. He favoured his father in a long thin face, protruding upper lip, nervous manner, and coltish expression. As an undergraduate at Harvard, he gladly abandoned college to step into his position as head of the American House of Astor. The world stood by, willing to applaud, but inclined to be critical of this possessor of $70,000,000. The year was 1912, when the New Freedom, the Square Deal, and Armageddon challenged entrenched wealth, sneered at hereditary fortunes, and questioned values that preceding heads of the House of Astor had known to be immutable. The search for social justice was the order of the day, and Vincent's right to inherit his fortune was under public scrutiny. Unless men of his type showed the rudiments of a social conscience they were likely to be held up as malefactors of great wealth, a fact which had led his cousin and heir apparent to the British Astor fortune, young Waldorf,

to become a theorist for Tory democracy. The public must be praised, not damned. Eyes turned to young Vincent Astor, recipient of ten thousand dollars every day of his life. But his mind was an empty slate.

Could liberals, reformers, perhaps even Socialists, write their own message thereon? Or would the guardians of the Astor Estate, Uncle James Roosevelt Roosevelt, Douglas Robinson, William A. Dobbyn, and Nicholas Biddle, watchdogs over the millions of all Astors, implant the proper cold and judicious ideas?

Governor Sulzer, quixotic Tammanyite, was the first to take young Astor to a high place and show him the world through various windows. They were labelled Politics, Business, Finance, Naval Militia. But the one that fascinated the young multimillionaire was Scientific Agriculture.

Adding to his Ferncliff acres, Vincent advanced until he became vice president of the Dutchess County Agricultural Society, prize-winner for his apples from the largest orchard in the state, distributor of tested oat seeds, and a recognized gentleman farmer.

Oats and apples were not likely to intrigue this nervous, high-strung young man for long. He came into his fortune on November 15, 1912, visited his office at 23 West Twenty-sixth Street to receive formally a power no other Astor had ever possessed — that of absolute control of the Astor Estate without hobbling entail devices — and then took the train at two p.m. for Ferncliff. Next day he bought a six-thousand-dollar racing car capable of a hundred miles per hour. His career around Rhinebeck and Newport was soon chequered by a series of accidents devastating to other cars, wagons, trees, and the local gendarmerie.

Public honours came thick and fast. He became a director of the New York Postgraduate Medical School and Hospital (whose president was his physician), a member of the sheriff's third panel, vestryman of the Church of the Messiah at Rhinebeck, director of the Public School Athletic League. The Rhinebeck baseball club voted him an honorary member and in turn he presented them with a baseball field and grandstand. He

joined the state naval militia and the National Civic Federation, a body of conservative labour leaders and employers.

During the Christmas season of 1913 the *New York Times* was featuring its Hundred Neediest Cases. A young Socialist writer who had gained fame for his exposé of the Chicago stockyards was thumbing through the paper, thinking highly Socialistic thoughts no doubt about the appalling picture the *Times* drew, once a year, of civilization-as-we-know-it. Then his eyes fell upon a description of young Vincent's estate at Ferncliff, with its marble swimming-pool and tennis court.

Upton Sinclair wrote a letter to Astor. "It is a monstrous thing," he said, "that in a country of such natural resources as our own, that millions should have to suffer the horrors of destitution. I cannot believe that a man who is young and has his life before him can be wholly indifferent to the conditions which I mean to urge. The poor people see in the papers the pictures of your magnificent and luxurious home, and they realize that is out of the rents which they pay in one form or another that all this luxury comes. Can you not realize how that embitters them?"

The letter must have stung young Astor. Already he had been taunted with the reproach that there were only two outstanding facts in his life: he had been born, and he had inherited the largest sum in American history. He consulted his associates at the National Civic Federation, grizzled old Sam Gompers, who had led the fight against his grandfather's cigar-factory tenements, Ogden Mills, whose wife had stood so staunchly by his father during the divorce scandal, and others. They were glad to show him the pitfalls and fallacies of Sinclair's Socialism. So Vincent sat down and replied to the author.

"I am fully convinced that the serious evils which have attended our industrial development can be and will be in time eradicated without overturning the fundamental basis upon which our Government and social fabric is founded. In saying this I am not unmindful of the wrongs to be righted, and that it is the duty of every man who has the interest of his country at heart to do what he properly can to establish and maintain industrial and social righteousness. . . .

"I am unable," he concluded, "to see how anyone can read such a statement and consider carefully the material I am sending you and still assert that we are 'moving today with the speed of an avalanche into one of the most terrific cataclysms in the history of the world.'"

Within less than eight months the World War broke out, justifying his prediction, Sinclair would have maintained, to the hilt.

Sinclair replied, but the newspapers considered the discussion closed. The writer quoted to himself Li Hung Chang:

"A poor man is ever at a disadvantage in matters of public concern. When he rises to speak or writes a letter to his superiors, they ask: 'Who is this fellow that offers advice?' and when it is known that he is without coin they spit their hands at him and use his letters in the cooks' fires. But if it be a man of wealth who would speak or write or denounce, even though he has the brain of a yearling dromedary or a spine as crooked and unseemly, the whole city listens to his words and declares them wise."

Vincent's desire to grapple with social problems interested him in an industrial bank scheme which was to "kill off usury." Unfortunately for the ideals of six-per-cent philanthropy, it was found that the promoters who had put up only $600,000 in common stock were on a parity with Astor and his friends, who had subscribed $2,000,000 in preferred stock. The philanthropists quit, but the Morris Banks went on.

Disappointed in that, Vincent turned to a Civic Federation project for studying the workings of pure food and drug laws at the time when the bleached-flour case, involving the use of oxide of nitrogen, was before the Supreme Court. Little came of that effort, however, and at twenty-four, concluding that he had pretty well run the gamut of social reform, he turned to more stimulating matters.

By then he was married. Not to that beauty to whom, at Newport, he had addressed verse praising eyes of heaven's own blue, hair like the golden sunshine, and cheeks like wild roses in May. Nor yet to Ina Claire, the actress, whom he had adored in his salad days. It was the girl next door who won Vincent's

heart. Helen Dinsmore Huntington was tall, athletic, vivacious, and intelligent, a double, some said, for Ina Claire. Often he had gone riding with her because her father's estate, Hopeland House, was near Ferncliff, and the two had known each other since childhood. She was descended from Adams Express founders, the newspapers added, in announcing her engagement, November 8, 1913.

Despite the dreary weather, the wedding was all that Vincent's grandmother, *the* Mrs. Astor, could have desired. There were white orchids, spring flowers, a hidden orchestra, Astors and Huntingtons in profusion with their collaterals, and Vincent's mother, Mrs. John Astor, his sister Alice Muriel, and his friend Herman Oelrichs, best man. The couple boarded the *Noma* at Hudson and departed for a honeymoon on the Chesapeake.

What did Helen think of the *Noma*? Perhaps the question began to form itself in her mind then, as it must in the mind of every woman who marries a yachtsman — is love worth the tortures and discomforts the sea can inflict upon a fastidious woman? And if, realistically, she looks down the avenue of the years, she must know that her husband will become more enamoured of the sea until gout, dyspepsia, and insomnia finish him, that his cruises will grow longer, not shorter, and that most of the table talk will be of tops'ls, holding ground, patented anchors, the recent nor'easter, and Mr. Somebody's funny new boat. In nine cases out of ten it can be forecast that the lives of man and woman, happily united on land, must part on the water. Just as certain it is, too, that nine brides out of ten will muffle their real feelings and protest a loyalty to the sea that they feel not. It will not be until the middle of the honeymoon cruise that she will break down and confess that she hates the boat, the crew underfoot, the rocking waves, the cramped quarters, and the shipshapeliness of it all. If she is a strict Episcopalian, she will thenceforth devote herself to charity and the fine arts, and she will be in London or Cannes while her husband is happily cruising the Mediterranean, the Caribbean, or the South Seas, in the bosom of boon companions.

Upton Sinclair's "social cataclysm" came to pass in August 1914, and thereafter the tempo of life quickened for restless young Astor. Here was something to stir the pulse, like the feeling of a hundred-horse-power motor under a sensitive throttle, infinitely more satisfying than scientific agriculture or social reform. Here tense nerves and yearnings for public approval could find outlet. Not that Vincent Astor argued in 1914 for American entry into the World War. At first he and the nation, horror-stricken, watched with fascination the great armies that wrestled across Europe. Then the forces that were to push America into the holocaust began their direct and oblique attacks.

Among these Mrs. John Astor was not the least. That lady had been living in London since her divorce, the leader of Anglo-American society, more British than the King. Although an American citizen, she mobilized on August 4. Not in uniform, of course, and not at all rashly. But whether in the salons of London, Paris, or New York, Mrs. John Astor expressed sentiments dear to all aristocrats who loved the English way of life, so superior to America's sprawling, unkempt, amorphous, democratic way.

To her, "a dream," "looking a picture," "for all the world like a beautiful piece of dresden china in a glass case," turned Lieutenant Colonel Charles A'Court Repington, the military correspondent of the London *Times*. Through his book, significantly entitled *The First World War*, floats this "beautiful Eighteenth Century aquarelle," in countless week-ends, luncheons, dinners, and receptions, in company with Queen Alexandra, the Aga Khan, the Baroness d'Erlanger, Vansittart of the Foreign Office, Lady Randolph Churchill, Lady Cunard, Winston Churchill, the Grand Duke Michael, Baron Maurice Rothschild, Prince Radziwill. The *Times'* military expert found Mrs. John Astor's company exhilarating and informative, for she knew how wires could be pulled in America. Before she left for New York in the winter of 1915, they discussed at her Grosvenor Square house "what she could do to help the cause over there. . . . We had a grand talk over the question of the union of the English-speaking races." In America

she assured her friends that the British had no ill will toward them. "I think, perhaps," she said, "they feel a little disappointed that we have not declared ourselves more openly as in sympathy with their aims and ideals in this war, which is really a war for ethical principles, and far above any feeling of nationality. Indifference on our part is incomprehensible to them, as I must say it is to me." On her return to England she complained that the British Embassy nursed their Scotch and sodas by themselves "instead of circulating and spreading the gospel."

To Vincent Astor, his mother's views on the issues involved in the war seemed most convincing. When J. P. Morgan floated the first Allied war loan in October 1915, he subscribed generously. In the same month the *New York Times* announced: "Eminent Citizens Join Patriot Band." Under slogans of "America First," "The English Language First," and "Efficiency," Vincent and Helen Astor had organized the National Americanization Committee, with headquarters in an Astor building.

At 840 Fifth Avenue (which had been reclaimed from Vincent's stepmother Madeleine through her remarriage) the Astors gave magnificent receptions for the Allied and America First causes. The Balfour delegation made their headquarters there. A drive was started to "Americanize" Yorkville, the German section of Manhattan.

By the end of 1916 so skilfully had the job been done that there was little left to do but declare war. Two months before that fateful step, Vincent was on duty patrolling the entrance to Brooklyn Bridge "to guard against hostile acts by German agents or sympathizers."

Late in February he undertook to organize yacht-owners and offered his own *Noma* to the government. In that task he collaborated with a Dutchess County neighbour and fellow seigneur, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Assistant Secretary of the Navy. A fast friendship developed which was to reward both fifteen years later.

When America plunged into the war, Vincent subscribed two million dollars to the Liberty Loan, paid the salary and expenses

of the policeman sent to drive the Police Honor Legion's ambulance in France, offered to pay and indemnify against loss any of his Ferncliff employees who enlisted, suggested that others join the home guard, pushed the Liberty Loan even among scrubwomen, and offered Ferncliff to the government as a hospital (paralleling his cousin Waldorf in England, who had placed Cliveden at the service of the Canadian wounded).

By June it was apparent that Vincent and Helen had done all they could on this side. He had served on his yachts, the *Noma* and *Nourmahal,* as junior officer, and now he left for France to continue his naval duties, while Helen reported to Bordeaux for canteen work with the Y.M.C.A. Vincent served as naval port officer, was transferred to the *Aphrodite,* became senior lieutenant and executive officer, and came home on the U-boat *117.*

On landing in New York, his words were almost identical with his father's on returning from Cuba: " I can say," said Vincent, " that I have thoroughly enjoyed every minute of the service that I have been able to render my country."

CHAPTER *ii*

Twentieth-Century Landlord

THE WORLD having been made safe for democracy, Vincent Astor returned to normalcy. Now there was nothing to worry about: the war had finished the Prussian menace and the Golden Twenties would solve social problems. An Episcopalian Deity watched from His heaven over the best of all possible worlds. Astor had only to relax, grow up, and enjoy himself.

The war had made a man of him, had proved to his own satisfaction that physical handicaps did not prevent him from measuring himself against other men and emerging a lieutenant, senior grade, with a gallant record. Upton Sinclair's "social cataclysm" had turned out an exhilarating episode; had that Jeremiah prophesied bigger social cataclysms to come, he would have been dismissed as a bilious crackpot unnerved by his own failure in life. The world was with the Astors and not the Sinclairs.

Then eat, drink, and be merry — and speed the livelong years! Speed, that was the Astor desire, speed on land, on water, in the air. His father had loved it and so did he. In 1916 young daredevils — Dario, Resta, Rickenbacker, De Palma, Chevrolet, and Bergdoll — were racing 250 miles around the Sheepshead Bay course to victory or death seeking the Vincent Astor ten-thousand-dollar trophy. Vincent himself had taken to seaplanes. Graceful yachts skimmed the sea off Newport at speeds, slight in miles per hour, but exhilarating to skippers and crews competing for the Astor Cup, the main trophy of American yacht-racing.

In 1919 Astor sold his *Noma*, reputedly the fastest boat of its kind, and set to work immediately on a new *Nourmahal* (Light of My Soul). But as the decade wore on, the *Nourmahal* seemed small and cramped. Private ocean liners were the order of the day. J. P. Morgan's *Corsair* could cross the Atlantic as easily as any greyhound of the sea; why shouldn't a *Nourmahal*? So Astor commissioned the Germania Company at Kiel to build him a Diesel-powered boat 264 feet long, with a speed of 16 knots and a cruising range of 20,000 miles. There was a sun-deck for games, a library in Norwegian pine, a lounge in beige and ivory, an open fireplace, a dining-room running the width of the ship panelled in deep-toned American walnut, a bath in every cabin, a crew of forty-two, and an annual bill of $125,000 for upkeep. Striding the decks of his new vessel in 1928, Astor was fit to be commodore of America's pre-eminent New York Yacht Club, and in fact he was so elected.

To him the *Nourmahal* was pure fun. Left ashore were real-estate problems, boards of directors, importuning collectors for charities, and family foibles. Out of sight of land he was monarch of all he surveyed. One might have pictured this Astor, master of his ship, facing the howling elements, the wild and uncontrollable seas, pitting his wit against the lashing waves. But the *Nourmahal* proceeded with the assurance of a *Normandie* toward its appointed ports, and neither wind nor wave could do much more than slow her down.

Men of affairs hastened to do honour to this Astor. In delicate compliment to Helen, whose forebears had run Adams Express, Vincent was elected in 1920 to the board of American Express. He followed a long line of his own forebears to the board of gilt-edged society's own railroad, the Illinois Central, later was a director of the Great Northern and of the Western Union. By virtue of his West Indies voyages, he became interested in Atlantic Fruit, but was squeezed out by United Fruit. Elected to the board of the Delaware & Hudson, that aristocratic old company whose directorate had been graced by John Jacob III, John Jacob IV, and William Astor, Vincent was denied his seat by an Interstate Commerce Commission jealous of interlocking directors.

Much as the financial world might bow deferentially to the reigning Astor, he was far from the towering pre-eminence of the Founder, William Backhouse, and John Jacob III. Ferdinand Lundberg examined the fortunes of America's "sixty families," and placed Vincent No. 13 on his list of wealthiest individuals. Names meaningless to William Backhouse and hardly known to John Jacob III — Rockefeller, Ford, Mellon, Whitney, Harkness, Baker — now ranked high above Astor's so far as millions were concerned. When William Backhouse died, a hoard of forty to fifty million dollars entitled him to first place; now such a fortune lacked noteworthiness in Wall Street. The days when landlord dukes and merchant princes led had ended. The fact was that in the fifth generation the Astor fortune was stagnant. It was doubtful whether Vincent was worth any more in 1925 — or 1940 — than on that November day in 1912 when he succeeded to ownership of the American share of the House of Astor. The prophet who in 1908 predicted that the family's fortune must snowball until it reached a billion in 1920 and eighty billions by A.D. 2000 had not foreseen the interplay of economic and social forces.

He could not guess, for instance, that 250,000 families would desert the East Side for the far reaches of the Bronx and Brooklyn in the decade of 1920–30; that sharper immigration laws would slow down the European influx to a mere dribble; that Avenue A, instead of tumbling a million dollars a year into Astorian pockets, would turn into a derelict area, blighted in profits.

Nor could he predict the increasing complexity of the metropolis and developing social consciousness which would pyramid city tax bills and siphon off steeply increasing rentals into municipal coffers.

Most important, he could not foretell America's pouring billions into a European war and turning upon the wealthy to help pay the bill through the income tax, which had appeared so iniquitous to William Backhouse. Nor the revulsion against hereditary wealth which found expression in estate taxes of such severity that Vincent Astor looked dubiously at the future of his millions.

So when the Nye munitions committee put its finger on him as a war profiteer, Astor believed he had exceptional reason to be indignant. He could complain that, quite to the contrary, the war had knocked a gaping hole in his coffers. Indeed, if he had been more hard-headed in his devotion to the Astor Estate in 1915, he would not have been so enthusiastic about the Allies. After all, he was not making munitions or peddling war loans; whatever induced him to be a war propagandist, it was certainly not the hope of financial enrichment.

In 1914, real-estate taxes took 15 per cent of his rentals; in 1922, 21 per cent, and in 1932, 32 per cent. His net income, as compared with the gross, had shrunk from 63 per cent before the war to 21 per cent in 1932, partly because of local, state, and federal taxes, partly because hordes of immigrants no longer clamoured for his tenements, partly because Broadway and Fifth Avenue had ceased to be the expanding city's only two important thoroughfares.

In the good old pre-war days the income of both the American and the English Astors had been computed in the millions, around $3,000,000 and $5,000,000 respectively. But in 1919 Vincent's taxable income was reported at $1,367,000 and in 1920 it sank to $799,000 — a figure so low that even his great-grandfather would have been disconcerted. By 1924, when Congress lifted the veil, it stood at $1,900,000, indicating a fortune of $37,000,000.

The truth was that the impetus given the estate by the Founder's wisdom had about run out, and none of his successors had the shrewdness to buy land, a single twenty-five-foot lot of which would be worth more than the original acre from which it was carved. Purchases in the Bronx were profitable enough, but suburban realty could hardly be the Golconda that Fifth Avenue, the Times Square district, Avenue A, and the West Side in congested Manhattan had proved. Even worse, the East and West Side tenement districts were being depopulated, Fifth Avenue had reached optimum values, and Times Square was becoming a tacky honky-tonk district filled with flea museums, Believe It or Not odditoriums, hot-dog and orangeade parlours. The five-and-ten's had even invaded that

part of Fifth Avenue once sacred to the memory of *the* Mrs. Astor. Choice shopping and residential districts spread out in the Fifties and along the East River, but no Astor had been able to foresee that.

The Astor Estate, believing that the peak had been reached in realty values, began selling after the war, the British heirs because they had to meet onerous taxation, the Americans to take advantage of the market. Property on Grand Street, in Union Square, the Astor Village on Bronx Parkway, bits on West Thirty-fourth Street opposite the Pennsylvania Station, tracts along the old Bear Swamp Road in the Bronx were unloaded.

The Longacre Building in Times Square went for $2,373,000; the site for the Paramount Building for $3,845,000; the Schermerhorn Building for $1,500,000. Even the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, once the gem of the Astor Estate, went to the wreckers, and the site originally graced by *the* Mrs. Astor's home was sold to the Empire State building for $7,560,000, the English Astors realizing as much from their half. That move reflected the fact that each generation must have its own Fifth Avenue. Vincent's grandmother had established the section below Murray Hill as Society's own capital; his father had torn down the rather shabby old mansion to build the resplendent Astoria Hotel; but to Vincent the grandeur of that vast hostelry was already badly tarnished, a dowdy old dowager. And so the tallest building in the world arose on the old Thompson farm which William Backhouse had bought in 1827 for $20,500. That done, finis seemed written on the development of 350 Fifth Avenue; beyond the Empire State Building men's minds could imagine nothing grander (as perhaps the 1890's could have imagined nothing taller, bigger, or more splendid than the Waldorf-Astoria!).

More notable than the sale of the Astoria was the demolition of Richard M. Hunt's French Renaissance château at 840 Fifth Avenue to make way — of all things — for a synagogue. Already John Jacob IV's stables had been sold for a reputed $2,000,000. In 1926 — so nervous was the tempo of the city's growth — the pride and joy of *the* Mrs. Astor's later years was

sold for $3,500,000 to Temple Emanu-el. To a European, the entire transaction would have seemed incredible. That Emanu-el's temple on Fifth Avenue at Forty-third Street, regarded as the most magnificent Jewish edifice in the world, and the Astor residence, certainly one of the most magnificent residences in America, should both fall under the wreckers' ruthless blows, to the financial profit of both the Temple and Astor, would have been inexplicable. But the Golden Twenties was the era of the incredible. Emanu-el had been offered $6,500,000 for its site. That left $3,000,000 for a building on upper Fifth Avenue by the Park, far more desirable than the old location a block from the Crossroads of the World.

So down came the four-story stone château, with its art gallery, the famed setting for the Four Hundred, the marbles and the tapestries, the enormous fireplaces. The paintings which *the* Mrs. Astor had accumulated as a background for her guests were knocked down by the auctioneer. John Ringling, the circus man, emerged triumphant with a dozen pictures, Brussels tapestries, gilded panelling, all authentically Astorian. Such sacrilege left Vincent unmoved; he just had no use for paintings of cattle in meadows eight feet long.

Instead, he built a simple six-story Georgian house at 130 East Eightieth Street for a mere $250,000. That was the pattern of the times. High taxes had made the Fifth Avenue palaces into an enormous drain; fabulous prices were being offered for their sites; more intimate dwellings could be kept up for $30,000 or so a year. Among the last to go was the Vanderbilt mansion, the very one which had forced *the* Mrs. Astor to admit Mrs. Vanderbilt to her set. But as if to vindicate the irrepressible character of that great lady, it was the Astor Estate which bought the Vanderbilt edifice, to raze it.

In his new home Vincent reproduced his father's bedchamber with furniture exactly as it was when John Jacob IV last used it. Even the bathroom was copied, with the same 1890 fixtures. Occasionally Vincent slept in the re-created room. Such was the touching loyalty of son to father, even though the father had been rigorous in discipline, sparing in cash, stern in commands. After the divorce Vincent had moved much closer to

his paternal parent, who in turn mellowed toward his only son. In pious remembrance, Vincent carried the thick gold watch which John Jacob IV had been wearing when he went down with the *Titanic*.

By the time 840 Fifth Avenue was sold, Vincent Astor, it was estimated, had disposed of realty holdings totalling $40,000,000. Most of that money he reinvested in land, new buildings, and improvements.

His own choice of East Eightieth Street for a home showed the trend of the times. Quiet side streets in the Seventies and Eighties off the Avenue, and dead-end streets on the East River offered peace and serenity — the most precious qualities to be sought in the roaring city. In 1927 Astor made his first purchases in the dead-end district, along East Eighty-sixth Street between Avenues A and B. The very names of the avenues betrayed their forlornness; the city fathers had run out of numerals and had thrown in letters. If the haut ton were to be lured into these purlieus, a good bit of face-lifting would be needed, and first of all the names must be brightened up. Avenue B was converted into East End Avenue, and Avenue A into York Avenue (but A and B were still good enough in the desolate reaches of the lower East Side). The city's most fashionable girls' school opened at Eighty-fourth and East End, Doctors' Hospital — the millionaires' favourite — at East End and Eighty-seventh.

It was ironical that Vincent must buy land here. The Founder, superbly wise man that he was, had beaten his great-great-grandson to this section by more than a hundred years, for his Hellgate country estate sloped down to the East River along what was to be Eighty-eighth and Eighty-ninth Streets. Unfortunately for Vincent, the Founder left his country estate not to his son but to his grandson, Charles Astor Bristed, the littérateur who had no more sense than to sell it to a Catholic nunnery. Tall apartments arose among the proudest of the Astorian possessions, overlooking the river (and the industrial shambles of Queens). Such buildings, along with the Astor Concourse in the Bronx, bespoke new trends in real estate, away from the slums and toward dwellings for the upper classes.

Vincent had already built the huge Astor Court on upper Broadway between Eighty-ninth and Ninetieth Streets, exceeded in size only by William Waldorf's Apthorp and Belnord — all on property that William Backhouse had acquired in the auction of a farm in 1860. For two generations the place — a few shabby structures, masses of native Manhattan rock, high board fences, heaps of refuse — had been an eyesore. Then came the subway, and land for which William Backhouse had paid $16,875 reached a valuation (with buildings) of $10,000,000.

The only building that linked Vincent with the Founder closed forever in 1913 when the Astor House on Broadway at Vesey Street was condemned to the wrecker. Once the biggest hotel in the world, the pride and joy of the fur merchant and his monument "for centuries to come," it was remembered only for its famous rotunda restaurant, where City Hall politicians, Park Row newspaper men, and business men dashed in to eat on high stools. Its constant fame through seventy-five years, the restaurant, still catered to an evening clientele composed of belated Wall Streeters, men whose minds lingered in the past, and the curious who sought the thrill of dining where presidents and princes had been fêted. Sentimentalists circulated petitions praying that the Astor House be kept as a memento of Little Old New York, whose "Park" had been City Hall Park opposite the hotel, whose social life had centred in that plainly severe and dignified old building. In 1915 a new Astor House Building, reminiscent in its simple lines of the grand old hotel, was erected, and later a plaque was unveiled as a reminder of the historic structure.

Up in Times Square, too, time demanded its changes. His father's Knickerbocker Hotel was turned into an office building: a ten-year lease for the grill room went for $1,000,000, the corner store was leased for twenty-one years for $3,000,000, and an annual rental of $300,000 was obtained for the ground-floor stores alone.

In the management of these matters, his main contact with reality, Vincent Astor was as shrewd as William Backhouse or John Jacob III. Not touched with the genius of the Founder,

he became thoroughly competent in analysing, with the aid of his managers, the main trends in Manhattan real estate and the desires of his clientele. Nicholas Biddle, his father's manager, guided him through his early years. E. Gerry Chadwick and John Carrington Yates succeeded Major Biddle. Yates in particular was a young man after Vincent's own heart, a pioneer in aviation.

Under their management the Astor Estate ceased to specialize in dreary, reprehensible slum properties, but catered rather to the classes, in apartments running from a modest $720 rental up into five figures. For the first time it was possible to advertise the wares of the Astor Estate without fear of verbal brickbats being tossed into the West Twenty-sixth Street offices by indignant critics of the slums. Squalor once had been the theme of most Astor holdings; smartness now became the watchword. Vincent himself, an epicure in matters of housing, paid minute attention to the comfort of his customers and, for the first time in the history of the estate, took pride in coupling his name with his buildings. "Vincent Astor Offers" headed his advertisements in the select magazines read by New Yorkers.

Parallel to the story of the Astor Estate through five generations was that of another Astor estate, the Wendels', through three. Something of the tough stock of the Founder's parents entered into that family, for John Gottlieb Wendel married Elizabeth, the sister of John Jacob Astor. Wendel was reputedly a porter in Astor's employ who was smart enough to follow his master's example. Undoubtedly the great fur merchant helped him get a foothold in that business and advised him to sink his savings in Manhattan realty. John Daniel, his son and half an Astor, obeyed old John Gottlieb's injunction to hold on to what he inherited. A sombre business man of the William Backhouse type, he refused to improve his property, much preferring to follow his cousin's example of exacting twenty-one-year leases with ground tenants building and managing the buildings, paying the taxes and assessments. John Daniel was blessed with but one son, John Gottlieb II, although he had eight daughters. This third-generation scion, as stolid as his forebears, managed properties valued in the tens of mil-

lions from a dingy office. Over his desk hung a sign: " No Real Estate for Sale." In mortal fear of designing men, he begged his sisters to remain celibate. When he died in 1914, two of them, aged spinsters, inherited realty valued at fifty million dollars. The petty doings of these frigid old ladies, cheated of life, paralysed by Midas, provided lessons for moralists and columns of copy for the newspapers. Finally the last of them died, ending mercifully a perfect Frankenstein's monster of a hoard that had stultified the lives of two generations. Religious institutions became the beneficiaries of the second fortune formed under the influence of the original John Jacob.

The bones of men long since dead were rattled in their graves in 1928 in a fantastic lawsuit filed in federal court by the John Nicholas Emerick Heirs Association. The astonishing claim of this suit was that nine hundred Emericks were the real owners of two thirds of the Astor Estate! In support of their claim, lawyers solemnly produced a contract, allegedly signed in 1787, establishing a partnership between Emerick and Astor in all enterprises in which they might be concerned, Emerick's share being two thirds. Even more astonishing, a will turned up, purportedly made in 1816, assigning his share in the partnership to the heirs of his two brothers ninety years hence!

This was the stuff of melodrama: fabulous riches hung enticingly almost within reach of nine hundred men and women, most of them poor, scattered from coast to coast and in foreign lands, fighting among themselves over lineage, telling preposterous tales out of the forgotten past, selling stories, imaginative and exaggerated, to the press, writing poems to the judge. Vital documents were produced from the lining of an ancient trunk, from a rust-encrusted snuff-box. In 1902, so it was said, the Astor Estate had sought out a descendant, identified upon his arrival in New York by a boutonniere, had led him into a room where the trustees of the estate, seated majestically upon a platform, informed him that thirty-nine million dollars was awaiting him and his co-heirs and instructed him to seek them out. An Astor representative had gone with this emissary to a Philadelphia churchyard, had opened old Emerick's tomb and

extracted a black box which contained an envelope, which the Astor Estate appropriated. Unfortunately the modern Emerick had not opened the envelope, and he grew sick in his search for relatives and gave up the task.

In the will appeared these declarations: "I farther state John Astor was a poor boy I loan him money and teach him the business. . . . I have made other legal papers, but fearing Astor as he is not the man I thought him when I made him my partner I am leaving papers in my trunk to safeguard my estate."

The whole affair had slept until 1863, when it was said an Emerick in Wisconsin had sent a lawyer east to negotiate with William Backhouse. But the lawyer became wealthy, and the Emericks got nothing. The case slept two more generations until another heir found the documents.

In court appeared doggedly determined Emerick lawyers arguing fraud and concealment, flanked by rows of sad-eyed heirs who felt that fortune at last was within their grasp. Outraged counsel for the English and American Astors spluttered with indignation.

"If you want me to speculate," said Judge Thacher, turning to the Emerick attorneys, "I should say that all your inferences were utterly absurd." The court could not understand why Emerick's brothers had not demanded an accounting of the partnership on his death in 1816. Certainly heirs could not come into court a hundred and eleven years later to demand that accounting, "an unconscionable act of injustice." He was upheld on appeal. Other angles of attack were developed in later suits, but none solid enough to withstand judicial scrutiny.

The suit raised philosophical questions more difficult of settlement than the legal problem. Clearly the Emericks were not entitled to two thirds of the Astor millions, but there were those who held as firmly that neither did Vincent nor his English cousins, Waldorf and John Jacob V, have any better claim upon the estate which the Manhattan cornucopia had poured into their laps. Was the accident of birth, they asked, any more valid reason for claiming millions than some old document cut from the lining of an ancient trunk?

So fabulous had become the fortune of the Astors that when

Franklin H. Head composed a fantasy on history, his accomplice, Frederick L. Olmsted, was pursued to his dying day by the credulous. With a wealth of circumstance, with much talk of old English jewel houses, of lords and ladies, of a Jacques Cartier and his mysterious cave on the coast of Maine, Head composed a hoax read in 1894 before a small Chicago literary club. Later it was printed by the author. He had found, he said, that the original John Jacob was a middling furrier of New York whose gains in 1799 totalled $4,011 on the books of his New York bank. Suddenly in 1801 more than $500,000 was deposited to his account, the loot from Jacques Cartier's discovery of Captain Kidd's treasure trove on the Maine island. Abruptly rich, Astor had then used Kidd's Spanish gold and jewels to build up his far-flung commercial enterprises.

Quite seriously, so ran Head's hoax, Olmsted as owner of the island where Kidd's hoard was found had sued the Astor Estate for some five millions or its equivalent in realty which old Astor had bought with his pirate's money.

People were so eager to believe the incredible that for years Olmsted had to repeat denials that he claimed title to part of the Astor Estate. Periodically the hoax was republished as a sparkling example of that literary pastime, but even though editors warned their readers that the story was merely an ingenious fabrication, the suspicion crystallized in the minds of many that the Astor millions stemmed from Captain Kidd.

CHAPTER *iii*

New Deal Episode

By 1932 a spectre haunted the West Twenty-sixth Street offices of the Astor Estate: the fear that realty values, the most solid of all, might vanish along with the billions in stocks and bonds that disappeared in the Great Depression. That spectre was clothed in steel and stone in the towering Empire State Building, which cast the shadow of tenantless offices across all Manhattan property. Politics, which had seemed to the gilded youth the sordid plaything of ambitious or corrupt men, suddenly became of absorbing interest. Even though the Astor Estate fared better than other landlords, continued paralysis of the nation's economic life would make any computation of Vincent's wealth a mockery. Clearly it was a case of " All hands to the pumps! " and History will not say that he failed to respond. To the astonishment of the rock-ribbed Republican habitués of the Knickerbocker and Union League Clubs, Astor became the sponsor, social and financial, of his Dutchess County neighbour Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Here, he cried, was no flaming radical, as painted, but a man steady, calm, and cheerful in perilous times, trained to guide the Ship of State through stormy weather. Stamped with the Astorian cachet, the Democratic nominee loomed as a possible saviour even in moneyed precincts where desertion of the Grand Old Party had seemed treason to the established order.

In 1924 Coolidge's election was worth ten thousand dollars to Astor; in 1928 he gave the identical sum to Al Smith's campaign. The switch could be traced to the County Trust Com-

pany, organized in 1926 by Tammany business men and contractors under the leadership of William F. Kenny, Al Smith's personal friend and contractor for New York's Gargantuan public utilities. The new bank was built on Astor land at Eighth Avenue and Fifteenth Street, and Vincent himself headed the list of directors. Among his associates were Herbert Lehmann, the banker who was later to complete the Smith-Roosevelt-Lehmann succession in the Executive Mansion in Albany, and William H. Woodin, who was to be Secretary of the Treasury. Astor thus entered the very sanctum of Democratic finance and high politics. Here were the men who financed Al Smith for the Presidency and Roosevelt for the governorship in 1928; here were the men to whose bank the Democratic National Committee owed $433,000 of its deficit; they were the men who helped to wipe out that deficit in 1930, Astor chipping in $25,000, the largest political donation any Astor had made since William Waldorf's "golden canvass" in 1881.

Such associations warmed both Astor and his companions in Tammany finance. Off for Florida for his winter vacation in 1930, Al Smith told reporters: "I had a very flattering invitation this morning from Vincent Astor to take a trip on his yacht, the *Nourmahal.* He invited me to use it to go to Havana or the Bahamas or even as far as the Philippines if I wanted to."

It was natural in 1930 that Astor should take kindly to the candidacy of Franklin D. Roosevelt for re-election as governor, if for no other reason than that he was sponsored by Astor's friends on the County Trust board. Actually the two men had known each other for years, for they were both Dutchess County gentlemen. As such many a tie bound them in understanding. Both loved the land as gentleman farmers, both loved the sea as gentleman sailors. They were linked by marriage, for Vincent's great-aunt Laura Astor Delano was the wife of the man for whom Roosevelt was named; James Roosevelt Roosevelt, Vincent's uncle, was a member of the old Dutch clan. In St. James's churchyard at Hyde Park members of both the Astor and the Roosevelt families slept under imposing monuments, including Vincent's aunt, Helen Astor Roosevelt,

who had died in England while her husband was with the American Embassy.

As the year 1931 wore on and it became apparent that the Republicans had lost their magic contact with Prosperity, eyes shifted more and more to Albany. Expectant were the eyes of landlords who found the depression particularly trying, what with unemployed families unable to pay rent, and ruined business men equally unable. Peter Goelet Gerry, Robert Goelet, Potter Palmer, and other puissant landlords examined the glaring rent-roll deficits of 1932 and saw the light in Roosevelt. Astor himself was reputed to be facing a million-dollar deficit that year — a fact so unprecedented in a century of Astor landlordism that Vincent contributed thirty-five thousand dollars to the Democratic campaign fund.

On August 4, 1932, just as the Presidential campaign was beginning to warm up, Astor and John J. Raskob, outstanding representatives of " Big Business," as the *Times* put it, had lunch with Roosevelt on the front porch of the Executive Mansion at Albany to discuss Democratic finances. Astor was immediately placed on the Democratic finance committee under Frank C. Walker, national treasurer. They found their most willing contributors, not so much among the big men in Wall Street who specialized in gigantism, as among merchants and manufacturers interested immediately in the public's purchasing power.

Greatness began to play about the tall, rangy form of Vincent Astor. The wealthiest member of the inner group that had planted the President-elect's feet along the road to destiny, he must have felt a vested interest in his man's success. And how better dispel unwarranted charges of Roosevelt's " irresponsible radicalism " than to invite him to accept the hospitality of the *Nourmahal*? Whatever Tories may have thought of Roosevelt, they could hardly say that he was plotting the overthrow of the American system with New York's greatest landlord, on one of the biggest yachts in American waters. On February 4, 1933 Roosevelt came over her side — eloquent symbol of reassurance to those who feared that every Democratic administration was

a national calamity. The Astor-Roosevelt party went ashore at Miami February 15 for a triumphal return through streets lined by a cheering populace. The President-elect and his bodyguard were in the first car; in the second Astor, Kermit Roosevelt, William Rhinelander Stewart (of another old New York landlord family), and brain-trust organizer Raymond Moley. The subject of conversation, in the darkening twilight, was the ease of an attempt on Roosevelt's life as the autos crawled through crowds that swirled around them. Astor was still speculating on that when Zangara fired at Roosevelt and mortally wounded Mayor Cermak of Chicago. The man was thrown on the trunk rack of Astor's car, a detective shot in the melee was placed in the tonneau, and the auto dashed for the hospital.

Now that his man was about to be installed in the White House, Astor saw wider vistas of public service open to a rich man. The press had been uniformly hostile to Roosevelt; a paper of commanding national importance was needed to help and guide him and to interpret him to the country. The project weighed on other minds, and particularly on that of Mary Harriman Rumsey, ambitious, energetic sister of Astor's crony, Averell Harriman. What America needed at this juncture were men of wealth imbued with the public interest and ready to invest in journalism, that great fulcrum for moving the public mind. That was not a new story to the Astors, for had not Uncle William Waldorf after his flight to England bought the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Sunday Observer*, and had not his cousin, John Jacob V, bought the London *Times*? There was no reason why an American Astor should not do likewise, the more so as Vincent had real admiration for the outstanding services of his British cousins to their country.

So Astor and the Harrimans went a-questing for a paper and found the McLeans' *Washington Post* on the auction block. For this decrepit property of potential value they were willing to pay a prudent sum, but not as much as Eugene Meyer, another millionaire who yearned at the same time to be of public service. Mary Rumsey and her friends really wanted a national weekly, anyway. Raymond Moley, professor of criminology, was called in. He, too, had had no experience in

journalism, but he was regarded as the organizer of the Roosevelt brain trust, the confidant of the new President, the one man best able to interpret the New Deal to America. On August 27, 1933 Moley and Astor motored from Ferncliff to Hyde Park to tell the President that they intended to launch a weekly magazine. Wishing them the best of luck, Roosevelt became Subscriber No. 1. Astor and Moley each pocketed a dollar bill as a souvenir.

Hyde Park was an effective sounding-board for the announcement of *Today*. Vincent issued a statement: "Since shortly after President Roosevelt's inauguration, I, with three associates, have considered the practicability of establishing a national weekly, in somewhat new form, but at a really popular price. . . . As we see it, there is now, as surely never before, a wide and useful field for a free, impartial and vivid interpretation each week of the momentous changes taking place in our American life.

"There is also the need of a vehicle for the expression of those ideas and proposals that will tend to direct these forces along planned and progressive channels. To supply such a medium, dedicated to truly American ideals, we shall do our utmost."

The first copy of *Today* was sent off to the President. In it he could read that Astor's magazine would not advocate social revolution or try to upset capitalism, but that it would castigate those inept, unjust, greedy and selfish persons who had been capitalism's worst enemies. *Today*, with majestic impartiality, would oppose alike "the predatory rich and the predatory poor." Moley, whose position as the man behind the President's ear was after all *Today's* sole asset, assured the public that Roosevelt would be no Hitler, no Mussolini.

A poor magazine, *Today* sank to 50,000 circulation, then rose slowly to 100,000 when it was declared to be "the most widely quoted magazine in America." Many assumed that Moley's weekly editorial reflected either what the White House was thinking or what it was about to think.

Early in 1935 the President was invited again to relax on the *Nourmahal*. He remarked that a week's trip would not justify the expense of commissioning the big yacht. "The *Nourmahal*

is always in commission," Astor replied. "It looks," quipped Roosevelt, "as if we'll have to increase taxes on the rich."

Such remarks were hardly funny. Moley was complaining that Morgenthau and Hopkins were "needling" the President against business; this new trend aimed to frighten capital.

Then on June 19, 1935 the President sent his "soak-the-rich" tax program to Congress, with a message on "the disturbing effects upon our national life that come from great inheritances of wealth and power. . . . The transmission from generation to generation of vast fortunes by will, inheritance, or gift is not consistent with the ideals and sentiments of the American people."

That message ended the intimacy of the two Hudson River seigneurs. The President could hardly accept the hospitality of America's pre-eminent inheritor of great wealth while he denounced vast inheritances. The owner of the *Nourmahal* could no longer turn his yacht into a Presidential craft.

By the end of 1935 Roosevelt had become an "irresponsible radical" even in the sanctum of *Today,* and it took a second World War to revive reports of a rapprochement.

CHAPTER *iv*

End of the Line?

VINCENT, most prepossessing of all the American Astors, was the perfect figure of the moneyed aristocrat who patronized bathyspheric, Antarctic, and South Sea Island expeditions, prided himself on keeping abreast of mechanical progress, understood airplanes and Diesel motors, and loved gadgetry. This streamlined, gleaming, satisfying world responded neatly to the wish of a man who had millions to spend. There were no mundane problems that money could not eventually solve. Smart scientists were constantly pushing back the frontiers of science, daring men were venturing to the very ends of the earth and deep into the seas and far into the heavens, and Astor was pleased to encourage them, to enjoy their company, to feel that he was part of this exciting struggle that promised at last to give man the command of his universe.

The gawky youth who took over the Astor Estate in 1912, developed by the World War into a man of some poise and self-confidence, was revealed to the nation during the First New Deal as an affable fellow. He had said of himself: "I am just a regular American."

His habits were temperate, his tastes on the quiet side. He read widely — history, biography, psychology, detective stories — and enjoyed news reels and musical comedy. His evening was built around Amos 'n' Andy. Like other Americans, he wanted a low auto licence number (and got VA1, VA2, and VA3), smoked a corncob because he liked it, and two packs of cigarettes a day. Penguins were his favourite animal. He went

to church occasionally, but was not oppressive in his religion.

The upper classes, he felt, had been libelled. " The popular notion that the moneyed leisure class romp from orgy to orgy with nothing to do but spend the money they never earned is altogether false. There are of course useless persons in the leisure class, but idlers are not unknown to any division of society. You'll find them in the slums as in the exclusive suburbs." He blamed " lurid newspapers " and their society columns for mischievous notions about the wealthy. " It is unreasonable," he said, " to suppose that because a man is rich he is also useless." " Personally," he added, " I cannot conceive of anything more wearisome than to live to accumulate and spend money as money."

Nevertheless this Astor loved money as much as did the Founder. " Each dollar is a soldier that does your bidding," he was fond of saying, with obvious relish. While he cared little for possessing more than seventy million dollars, he was determined to possess no less. His philanthropies, mostly on the quiet side, came from earnings and not from capital.

Most rich people, he held, have " the usual American tastes, usual American appetites, usual American jobs. They may, it is true, have more money than the average American, but they do not eat more meals, they do not wear any more clothes, and they cannot sleep in any more beds. If there is any social gulf at all between different groups of Americans, it isn't to be measured so much by money as by newspaper headlines."

In 1925 such sentiments sounded well in print; several years later he might have wished to amend his remarks about the rich eating no more, wearing no more, sleeping in no more beds, than millions of other Americans. Indeed, when he sold his Sands Point estate in 1933, he hardly noticed that he had just disposed of seven master bedrooms, ten bathrooms, with other accoutrements of a suburban ménage. There were still left to him his town house on East Eightieth Street, his country estate of Ferncliff, his winter homes in Florida and Bermuda, and his year-round home on the *Nourmahal.*

Like many another leisured American, he visited Mussolini's Italy and found it fair. " At least on the surface, things seems

to be in fine shape there," he reported. "Trains are running on time and the railroads carry three times the amount of freight they did five years ago. I did not talk to any members of the Government, but all Italians I met said Mussolini was responsible and that he had remade the country entirely."

In America, too, things seemed to be in fine shape "at least on the surface" in the Golden Twenties, and so they continued right up to the point when the unthinkable happened, and the Astor Estate's expenses outran its income for the first time in history. The great social problem then became Vincent Astor's individual problem and he attacked it with forthrightness, good cheer, and a commendable lack of hidebound conservatism. When his income had returned to normalcy, the social problem disappeared, so far as he was concerned, and he cried quits. Once again, on the surface, things seemed to be in fine shape. But if there should be a third "social cataclysm" not so easily bridged by democratic means, there was no assurance that Astor would not hail an American Mussolini with the same enthusiasm with which he hailed Il Duce. The trains must run on time, and apparently it mattered little under what regime so long as the Astor transportation schedules were not disturbed.

Perhaps he conceived the world's problems in much the same light as those of his own St. Regis Hotel. In piping times he had sold it, but it bounced back during the Great Depression. Graciously he installed Raymond Moley, the criminologist, brain-truster journalist, in charge as receiver and then summoned clever architects to make over his father's old building into the smartest hotel in New York. The St. Regis became the first wholly air-conditioned hotel in the world; its Iridium Room was the rendezvous of café society; its blue ice for bluebloods reflected the creative imagination of its owner, who saw red ink change into black. As connoisseur of the good life, he delighted in supervising arrangements. If his cousin's Astor Hotel on Times Square was still the city's leading banquet centre, his own St. Regis was the most brilliant social resort. Ingenuity and enterprise solved that problem, and it could solve others — such, for example, as the sad plight of his adventure in independent journalism. After Raymond Moley quit the White House, his

editorials in *Today* lost their oracular touch and to many seemed merely petulant. Astor and his associate Harriman thereupon merged *Today* with *News-Week*, installed new management, and watched their enterprise burgeon. Advertising men noted an eagerness to placate the business elements; the brave ideals on which *Today* had been launched gave way to an editorial policy in *Newsweek* indistinguishable from that of other rich and conservative magazines.

Astor's work was his amusement. As a new-style landlord he sauntered through his St. Regis and his swanky apartments checking on the fulfilment of his commands, on the comfort of his guests, on the introduction of glittering gadgets to keep the Astor Estate properties ahead of the crowd. Year by year he kept up his *Nourmahal* as the most modern yacht afloat. Every port in the West Indies and the Mediterranean knew the *Nourmahal* as intimately as did Newport. Scientists and sportsmen were guests on expeditions to the Galápagos and South Sea Islands, and their treasure trove was duly deposited in the Bermuda and New York aquariums. Thus he combined pleasure with patronage of science. Kermit Roosevelt, W. Rhinelander Stewart, C. Suydam Cutting, his brother-in-law Bob Huntington, and like-minded gentlemen-adventurers were guests on such voyages, and Mary Cushing, beautiful sister of young Mrs. James Roosevelt, enjoyed the hospitality of the *Nourmahal* on many of its Bermuda and West Indian cruises.

A sponsor of Admiral Byrd's expeditions into the Antarctic, he was pleased to note that a Mount Vincent Astor rose in Byrd Land near Mount Louis McHenry Howe, Mount Farley, the Rockefeller Mountains, and Kent Cooper Glacier, along the Jacob Ruppert Coast.

His friendship with Kermit Roosevelt and his love of the sea were reflected in investments made in the Roosevelt Steamship Company, later absorbed in the International Mercantile Marine Company.

He was a member of clubs seemingly without number; his annual dues payments would have supported a large family in luxury. Among them were: the Players, New York Press, City,

Knickerbocker, Union, Harvard, Tuxedo, Brook (his favourite), Links, Whitehall, Broad Street, Racquet and Tennis, Piping Rock, New York Yacht, Jekyl Island, Manhasset Bay Yacht, New York Farmers, Rockwood Hall, Somerset Hills, Eastern Yacht, Seawanhaka-Corinthian Yacht, Habana Yacht, Royal Thames Yacht, Travellers (of London), Gulf Stream Golf, Clambake, Newport Casino, Fort Orange, Royal Bermuda Yacht.

Of societies, too, there seemed no end: the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York, Merchants' Association, Bronx Board of Trade, National Aeronautical, War Society of Cruiser and Transport Force, Union Society of American Wars, Navy League, Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers, U. S. Naval Institute, Naval History Society, Honor Legion of the New York City Police Department, Holland Lodge of the Masons (to which the Founder had belonged), New York Genealogical and Biographical, U. S. Naval Reserve Officers' Association, Pilgrims, Dutchess County Society of the City of New York, Academy of Political Science, National Institute of Social Sciences, National Association of Audubon Societies, Military Order of the World War, Geographic and Historical Society of the Americas.

He was a director of Western Union, Chase National Bank, Illinois Central (dropped in 1938), Great Northern, City and Suburban Homes Company, International Mercantile Marine, and trustee of the United States Trust, New York Public Library, and New York Zoological Society.

Long ago the great effort of her war work seemed to have exhausted Helen Astor, and she retired to her dear Paris, to join other American women attending the races. In 1922 the *New York Times* reported that she had taken a house in the Avenue Bois de Boulogne "for an indefinite period." Friends said she was in France "to establish a legal residence." That further excited the curiosity of other New York newspapers not nearly so restrained as the *Times*. She was asked point-blank if she was contemplating divorce.

"I am getting tired of denying and discussing my divorce,

which has been taking place in the U. S. newspapers for the past five years," she retorted. "If the newspapers are bound to divorce me, let them do it. I don't care."

Vincent joined in her denial. "You can't make that denial any too hot for me," he told ship reporters on the *Mauretania.* "You may say this much: Neither Mrs. Astor nor myself nor any agent representing either of us has made any move toward a divorce or instituted any legal action in the United States and its dependencies, on land, water or in the air."

Nevertheless people would read the newspapers detailing Helen's long visits in Paris and London, and Vincent's voyages on the *Nourmahal* and his long stays in places where his wife was not, and draw their own conclusions. Such speculations tied in with Vincent's childlessness. The master of the Astor Estate could be forgiven a divorce if only to assure him an heir. But in 1926 he was again so annoyed by the divorce canards that he denounced them as "pernicious statements." For the past six years, he complained, he had been obliged to deny such rumours every time he went for a cruise or Helen went abroad to visit relatives and friends. Nevertheless reporters continued to observe meticulously the guest lists of the *Nourmahal* in quest of a name that might appear there with more or less regularity.

In 1940 the rumours which had been so often denied turned into fact when Helen got a "mental cruelty" divorce in Wyoming. The property settlement was kept secret.

A few weeks later, without fanfare or advance publicity, which had marred his father's second marriage, Vincent wedded Mary Cushing, daughter of the late Dr. Harvey Cushing and sister of the former Mrs. James Roosevelt, and his guest on many cruises. W. Rhinelander Stewart, Jr., Astor's crony, served as best man, while Mrs. Ava Ribblesdale, the former Mrs. John Jacob IV, beamed on the newlyweds.

John Jacob IV had fled on his *Nourmahal* after his divorcé wedding to Madeleine Force; a later *Nourmahal* was waiting for Vincent and his bride, and thereafter an extended honeymoon at Bermuda.

Vincent's sister, Ava Alice Muriel, eleven years his junior, was by no means so disappointing to those who sought spice in their

VINCENT ASTOR WITH HIS FIRST WIFE
the former Helen Dinsmore Huntington

PHOTO, KEYSTONE

VINCENT ASTOR WITH HIS SECOND WIFE
the former Mary Cushing, as they were about to sail on their honeymoon

PHOTO, ACME

society columns. Heiress to five million dollars plus accumulated interest since 1912, she was brought up by her mother, Lady Ribblesdale, the former Mrs. John Astor, in London.

In 1924 she married Prince Sergei Platonovich Obolensky Neledinsky-Meletsky, the fascinating Russian with a far-away look in his handsome, melancholy eyes, a magnificent dancer, a charming musician. It took three ceremonies to weld the dollar princess to the Russian noble. First there was the civil rite in the Prince's Row register's office with Lady Ribblesdale, her cousin Lord Astor, and the American vice-consul in attendance. The small wedding party then hastened over to the Chapel Royal in the Savoy, where Nancy Astor bustled in to congratulate the groom and witness the Anglican ceremony. The growing party then hurried to the Russian Orthodox Church, where Prince Paul of Serbia was best man, and Prince and Princess Nicholas of Greece, Major John Jacob Astor V, and Lady Violet and Pauline Astor Spender-Clay felicitated the groom.

The name of Ivan, strange to the Astor clan, graced the son of Princess Obolensky. Vincent ceded a part of Ferncliff to the Prince and Princess and princelet. Unfortunately Serge had no better luck with his second Princess than with his first; Muriel got her divorce at Yerington, Nevada, off the beaten track, in 1932.

Serge remained in high favour with Vincent, who allowed him to develop the Maisonette Russe, a small, imperially draped restaurant in the St. Regis.

In that café society over which Prince Serge presided with such charm and dash, Mrs. Vincent Astor and Cholly Knickerbocker were shining lights, and in it revolved the William Rhinelander Stewarts, the Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitneys, the John Hay Whitneys, Mrs. Harrison Williams, Bob Benchley, Elsa Maxwell, Herbert Bayard Swope, Peter Arno, Jerome Napoleon Bonaparte — all very smart, sophisticated, and bored, but willing to be amused. Café society was centrifugal, distracted, and anything but formal, yet it was the lineal descendant of *the* Mrs. Astor's Society, and the Astors were still its centre.

Within a month of her divorce Muriel married Raimund von

Hofmannsthal in a Newark police court, to the amazement of her brother. Raimund, twenty-six, three years younger than his bride, was said to be a Viennese writer and dramatist, the son of Hugo von Hofmannsthal, the poet and dramatist.

Lady Ribblesdale, the former Mrs. John Astor, was perhaps no better pleased than her son over Muriel's second marriage. The one-time Ava Willing had also had her divorce and her second marriage, but none could cavil at her taste in selecting Lord Ribblesdale, a gentleman of the old school. Occasionally the grand lady of Anglo-American society swept through New York and Washington, accorded the homage due her as a Philadelphia Willing, a New York Astor, an authentic English titlebearer. During the Second World War she came to America again, afforded passage on a crowded American liner at the command of the White House. With bombs dropping impartially on Mayfair and Poplar, Lady Ribblesdale appreciated that America was now "the better 'ole" and abandoned her allegiance to the Crown in favour of her native land. Thereafter she was styled simply Mrs. Ava Ribblesdale. The *Herald Tribune,* in reporting her new allegiance, boxed alongside an item from London about an English boy who said that "he would rather be bombed to fragments than leave England."

Fortunately Lady Ribblesdale need have no concern over the newspaper headlines concerning John Jacob VI, for he was no son of hers. His half-brother Vincent, however, regarded with dismay the date of August 14, 1933, when Jack would come into his three million dollars plus accrued interest since 1912.

Of all the gilded youth of the century, this young Astor ranked first. Even as a babe in arms, he could not live on $25,000 a year, his mother Madeleine told the court in 1915. For the first three and a half years of his life, $6,323 had been paid to physicians, $4,007 to attorneys, $5,790 for clothing, toys, and supplies. His mink robe cost $580, an ermine baby robe $185, an ermine robe and muff $230. But an unfeeling judge decreed nevertheless that only $20,000 of his annual $140,000 income could be applied to his needs, and so Madeleine must needs dip into her own purse for $166,000 in that period.

As he grew up, Jack developed his own ideas of what was

VINCENT ASTOR

WITH HIS MOTHER, LADY RIBBLESDALE,

on the occasion of her return from England because of the war

PHOTO, ACME

worth while in life. Certainly college wasn't, for that involved studying and he had no interest in studies. Speed was his real passion, and he expressed it by buying fast and expensive automobiles. His stepfather reported that when he came into his money he promptly bought ten cars.

The affairs of Jack's mother leaped into the newspaper headlines. For the former Madeleine Force Astor, who had sacrificed a $5,000,000 life trust and the use of 840 Fifth Avenue and Beechwood in order to marry W. K. Dick, had gone to Reno. A Signora Tosca Fiermonte was saying in an interview with the *Popolo di Roma* that she would not grant her prizefighter-husband, Enzo, a divorce unless he gave her $30,000 for the education of her child. Enzo turned up in Reno, too, but protested that he hardly knew Mrs. Dick. On July 21, 1933 Mrs. Dick received her divorce; on August 14 her son Jack came into his fortune; on September 4 Enzo, who had won a male beauty contest in California, got his divorce. He left immediately for Bermuda, where soon after Mrs. Dick fell, so it was said, and broke an arm.

The wedding of Madeleine, forty, and Enzo, twenty-six, was celebrated at her bedside some weeks later at Doctors' Hospital in New York ("the most democratic experience that has befallen the Astor family in all its interesting life," Westbrook Pegler commented). The next day an ambulance moved Mrs. Astor-Dick-Fiermonte to a Florida-bound train for her third honeymoon. Enzo found himself recipient of a thousand dollars a month.

The focus of the tabloid press then shifted to her son, Jack Astor. Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Lewis Gillespie of New York and Newport announced the engagement of their daughter Eileen, niece of Lady Camoys, to Jack. The family genealogy took up the better part of a column. Busily through December and January plans were spun for the St. Thomas's Church wedding on February 6. Negotiations also proceeded on Eileen's pre-nuptial settlement. Jack proposed giving her $1,500,000, but his lawyers and even Mr. Gillespie, it was reported, advised $500,000.

On January 21 romance came to a noisy end in the lobby of

the Savoy-Plaza with Jack swinging verbal punches with the fair Eileen and saying the most uncomplimentary things about her parents. Eileen wept and Jack stamped out of the hotel in a rage. The next day the engagement was cancelled and a few weeks later Jack left on his honeymoon cruise around the world alone.

Hardly had he returned to New York, composed in soul after his trying experience with Eileen, than Cupid struck again. This time it was Ellen Tuck (Tucky) French. Her mother, Mrs. Livingston French of Park Avenue and Newport, hastened to enter a denial, and then reneged. Ellen, who was to have been a bridesmaid at Eileen's wedding, was instead to be the bride! Ellen's ancestry was fully as impressive as Eileen's and filled nearly as much space.

Unfortunately the ring intended for Ellen was still held as hostage by the Gillespies. The ceremony of its return, following weeks of tabloid speculation, was held at Cartier's, with Mr. Gillespie handing back *the* Mrs. Astor's ring and other imperishable gifts to Jack in return for the apology.

In Newport it was decided there had been no such furore over a wedding since Jack's father, John Jacob IV, had married Madeleine in 1911. On the wedding day society's capital resembled Nottingham Goose Fair. The sedate *New York Times* required an entire page for the full flavour of it, while the tabloids were ecstatic over the family mix-ups involving Jack's mother, Madeleine, her former husband (who was there), her present husband (who was not), and Jack's new father-in-law, a piquant character down on his luck.

Jack got a twenty-five-dollar-a-week job with International Mercantile Marine, but he gave it up. "Sometimes," he confessed, "I didn't get through until five o'clock. It would be six o'clock before I reached home and I would have to get up very early the next morning." He departed for Italy.

Father-in-law Francis Ormond French soon became "Society's problem-in-law," what with his books revealing all about Newport, his bankruptcy, which listed among liabilities a sixteen-dollar laundry bill, and his application to the Newport WPA authorities for a job.

JOHN JACOB ASTOR VI (1912-)

the second son of John Jacob Astor IV and Madeleine Force Astor, with his wife (née Ellen Tuck French)

PHOTO, ACME

With a jilted fiancée, an indignant mother-in-law-to-be, an indigent father-in-law, a mother married to an Italian prize-fighter, and a half-brother who washed his hands of him, it could not be said that the life of John Jacob Astor VI was an inspiration to struggling youth. Indeed, his grandmother, *the* Mrs. Astor, would have died for shame could she have foreseen the amazing chronicles of the last of the American John Jacob Astors. Within a century the proudest name in the Manhattan-Newport aristocracy had descended from the sublime to the ridiculous.

And what could *the* Mrs. Astor have said of her daughter-in-law, the one-time Mrs. John Jacob Astor IV, now Mrs. Enzo Fiermonte? The astonishing adventures of her romance with Fiermonte he finally recorded in six lurid articles in *True Story Magazine*, that repository of the world's amatory troubles. He retired to Europe with a divorce. In 1940 Mrs. Astor-Dick-Fiermonte found release in death from a life shadowed by the Astor millions, while Fiermonte was completing a film based on his life with her.

The senior branch of the family may well have felt that the goings-on in the junior branch heaped up fuel for those demagogues who railed against inherited wealth. Vincent Astor could compliment himself on distinguished service to his country in war and in peace, and on an enlightened real-estate policy that provided New York with swank apartments instead of glum tenements. No longer, after the sale of his remaining First Avenue tenements, could the reproach be levelled against him that the Astor Estate battened on the misery of the East Side poor. For thirty years the estate had been disposing of its holdings in the old radish patch. With immigration choked off and taxes rising, the East Side was no longer the Golconda of yore.

The end came dramatically for the last of the Astor tenements. Fiorello La Guardia had been elected mayor of New York over Vincent Astor's opposition, and he took pleasure in placing debonair Langdon W. Post in charge of the Tenement House Department, which had been moribund for thirty years. At this time, too, Ernest Gruening, crusading editor of the *New*

York Evening Post, turned loose his reporters and cameramen on the Astor slums.

Caught in a trap, Astor offered to the newly organized Municipal Housing Authority his tenements at less than the land value. Using a word hitherto shunned by his clan, he told the press that "I desire to do anything within reason to help clear these slums." The Housing Authority proceeded to demolish every third tenement and to reconstruct the others into First Houses.

Great blocks remained of the Astor slums — but they were no longer under the management of the Astor Estate. Their rooms remained as dark and dank, their hallways as combustible, their air shafts as narrow as when William Backhouse, John Jacob III, and William Astor had built them. Prudently the estate had sold them and invested in uptown hotels and apartment houses so that only a cantankerous moralist could link the name of Astor and the slums.

Proud as he might be now of his properties, Vincent Astor was denied the joy and comfort that warmed the latter years of the Founder as he surveyed his family. It seemed as if Vincent Astor was the last of them. In five generations the stock of the Founder had finally petered out in America. What would become of the Astor Estate? Vincent gave his answer to a reporter: "How do you know there will be any [estate] to give away? The inheritance and other taxes might wipe it out and Uncle Sam get it all."

He might point to the tardy triumph of James Gordon Bennett's suggestion in 1848 that half of John Jacob Astor's $20,000,000 fortune belonged really to the people of New York, whose enterprise had made him into a multimillionaire. Government — municipal, state, and federal — now was taking a good half of Vincent's income, leaving to him perhaps not much more than $1,000,000 a year. And if he were to die tomorrow, state and federal governments would step in to demand, roughly, three fourths of the estate. That would leave perhaps $20,000,000: within a century the Astor Estate would be back to where it started in 1848.

Such a development exceeded even the hopes of Senator

George W. Norris, who had raised almost a lone voice in 1913 for an estate tax that would collect half of Astor's fortune. The Nebraskan, whose life spanned Populism, Progressivism, and the New Deal, had declared that Astor owed his wealth to the people of New York. "From the man in the street who laid the paving blocks to the master minds who planned the giant skyscrapers which lift their heads up in the clouds, every one of them had contributed something to the Astors. Every drop of sweat that ever trickled over the brow of labor on Manhattan Island for a century has contributed its mite to the Astors."

"What," he asked, "can Mr. Astor do with $80,000,000 that he cannot do with $36,000,000? We ought to have on the statute books a law that when a man who has the fortune is through with it when he is dead, he should not be able to pass it on from one generation to another."

If the law did not end Astor's fortune, it seemed likely that Fate would, for lack of an heir, unless his second marriage proved more fruitful than his first. Thus would end the House of Astor on American soil, and no more fitting epitaph could be written in Trinity Cemetery than the words from a *Sun* editorial in 1875 on the death of William B. Astor, that he "had done nothing all his lifetime but build houses and collect their rents. His sons and his sons' sons will do no more. . . . What they will chiefly care for will be to hold on to what they have."

It remained only for Vincent to have his final jest with the Bureau of Internal Revenue. Perhaps he could perpetuate the Astor Estate by dedicating it to the support of an Astor Foundation for Better Housing in America.

BOOK EIGHT

THE ENGLISH ASTORS

CHAPTER *i*

Aristocrat at Home

WILLIAM WALDORF cut the House of Astor in two when he fled scoffing America in 1890 to found an English House in "a country fit for gentlemen to live in." After his flight the world's richest refugee was tormented by two ambitions: to revenge himself upon his native land, and to acquire in his adopted country a foothold so firm, a prestige so incontestable, that the respect owed him because of birth, blood, and wealth would be his.

To Astor, American manners showed a continuing surliness which had hounded even the Founder to his grave. John Jacob Astor, his great-grandson complained, was "caricatured until only an odd travesty survives. . . . By the press in particular, with the exception of a few serious journals, he has been continually derided and reviled with that spirit of pure malignity which pursues the successful man. It is not democratic to climb so high. . . .

"I remembered when a lad hearing my father say of some of the more virulent of these attacks — 'It is enough to make one wish to abandon such a country' — an opinion I subsequently learned to share."

Still rankling in 1890 were the taunts hurled at him during the "Golden Canvass" of 1881; on giving a thousand dollars toward a statue of William the Silent in New York he wrote: "The faculty of self-restraint under cowardly and brutal misrepresentation such as William the Silent endured without a word deserves a place among the heroic virtues."

With cold fury or with supercilious amusement Astor read the comments of press and preachers on his desertion of America. He determined to have his own macabre revenge on his critics.

On the morning of July 12, 1892 every paper in New York but one announced the death of William Waldorf Astor, some in blazing headlines, others in soberer type, but all in stories that spilled over to inside pages. He had died at home of pneumonia, according to a cablegram to his New York office which was distributed to the newspapers by Trinity's sexton, who specialized in Astorian funeral rites. His lawyers contributed a glowing tribute to him as an artist, writer, sculptor, lawyer, politician, and traveller as well as a capitalist and money-maker.

The *Tribune* was restrained: " The death of William Waldorf Astor, though not an event of great and lasting significance either in the world of action or the world of thought, will be generally deplored."

The Philadelphia *Public Ledger* said: ". . . His nature was kindly, his manner simple, unaffected, sincere. He had many friends, who admired him for his learning, his talents, and the noble qualities of heart which were his most distinguishing characteristics."

Such an obituary would almost have justified death itself, Astor must have reflected upon reading it.

The *Herald* was alone among morning New York newspapers in trusting the Associated Press rather than the Astor Estate office. Servants at Astor's home, Lansdowne House, had denied the report of his death; he had a slight cold but was recovering. The following day it was the humiliating duty of the *Herald's* colleagues to announce that " W. W. Astor is Not Dead." The *Tribune* noted that he would " enjoy the rather remarkable distinction of having been able to read his own obituary notices."

An investigation was launched by both the Astor offices into the hoax, but nothing came of it. His own apparent enjoyment of the story, and the fact that his office was responsible for it, led friends to shake their heads and even the faithful *Tribune* to print a London dispatch that his mind was affected. His movements were shrouded in the utmost secrecy, it was re-

WILLIAM WALDORF ASTOR (1848-1919)

the son of John Jacob Astor III, who found his native land intolerable, the modern knight who wielded his cheque-book as a sword to win a patent of nobility in England

ported; his dislike for publicity had become almost a mania. Servants and employees were under instruction on pain of discharge to answer no questions from the press. The Associated Press denied that Astor was insane or that mystery was novel to him. "The Astors have always lived a peculiar life here; they know few people and live in solitary state at Lansdowne House."

Having shown his contempt for the American press, Astor proceeded unwittingly to show his contempt for the British by buying the *Pall Mall Gazette* and turning its politics overnight from Liberal to Conservative. This proud old paper, "written by gentlemen for gentlemen," under the direction of radical John Morley, E. T. Cook, and W. T. Stead, who introduced the interview and the "extra" to staid English journalism, had its staff called together. The new publisher announced that while yesterday's edition had been Liberal, tomorrow's would be Conservative. He was astonished when most of the staff walked out, to establish the *Westminster Gazette*. This was an angle of journalism new to him; he had taken it for granted that the proprietor paid the piper and called the tune. But the tradition in England had been that the proprietor paid the bills while the editor directed policy.

Fleet Street reeled under the impact of American money; the year 1893 was to be regarded later as the turning-point in London journalism, marking the beginning of millionaire control of the press. Within a generation every newspaper proprietor was to be a millionaire, and a lord to boot. Lord Rhondda put more bluntly what Astor had left unsaid: "A newspaper in London is a source of political power and I am prepared to spend some money on it."

Unshaken, Astor set out to buy a new staff. He met at dinner handsome, agreeable young Henry John Cockayne Cust, M.P., heir to the Earl of Brownlow, "whose knowledge," in H. G. Well's words, "of literature and the world were as manifest as his manners were charming." He collected a brilliant staff with "the highest of spirits and with a fine regardlessness of expenditures — for was not Astor notoriously a millionaire?" Cust's office sported luxury such as Fleet Street had never

known; he held forth in a magnificent drawing-room, his desk like a creation out of Hollywood-to-come. His journal he set out to make " the most brilliant of recorded papers."

There was only one difficulty: the proprietor not only signed the cheques but submitted articles " all out of his own head." Cust demurred and suggested, half in jest, that perhaps they were more suited to a literary magazine. Astor agreed, and established the *Pall Mall Magazine,* a handsome thing, " entertaining but not frivolous, refined but not weak," with cover in colour, the poem " Astrophel " by Swinburne and an essay on Mme Récamier by Astor in the first issue.

With the *Pall Mall Gazette* came the *Pall Mall Budget,* a weekly on which Mrs. Astor doted, and notable in history chiefly as affording young H. G. Wells an outlet at five pounds each for pseudo-scientific yarns. In 1893, the year of Astor's entry into journalism, Wells had scraped along on an income of £380; the next year he received £583, and in 1896, £1,056.

The proprietor rarely deigned to visit his newspaper offices. Instead he summoned his editors to him in the splendid Astor office on the Embankment, to be chided or praised.

He outlined an idea to one editor.

" But that will cost a vast deal of money, sir," the editor objected.

" Pray, sir," answered Astor, " who pays the bill? "

Memorable were the dinners he gave his staff. Thomas Hardy tells of one at the Grand Hotel in 1894 — " an artistic and luxurious banquet with beds of roses on the table, electric lights shining up like glowworms through their leaves and petals (an arrangement somewhat of a novelty then) and a band playing behind the palms."

It was said that he played a hand " dour, domineering and unprecedented " in the journalism of the 1890's. But his papers, thanks to his open-handed munificence, encouraged many younger writers such as Wells and Rudyard Kipling and J. M. Barrie. Among their writings were his; the most expensive literary sandwich in history. But he was satisfied. His *Pall Mall Gazette,* a leading Tory evening paper, his *Pall Mall Magazine,* a leading literary monthly, his *Pall Mall Budget,* a leading home

weekly, established him as a moulder of public opinion, a patron of the arts — and all at a cost trifling in comparison with what he would have had to pay in his native land. And England, more placid, less turbulent, subjected neither his motives nor his ambitions to the savage inspection which he might have expected from sections of his native press.

This American Mæcenas who supported so many Horaces in Fleet Street was pursuing a burning ambition to establish himself as an English gentleman, cost what it might. His rent-rolls in Manhattan stood up well under the panic of 1893 and were about to swell magnificently. His section of Fifth Avenue was being transformed from Society's street into the élite hotel and shopping centre of America's Front Door, and his Times Square was burgeoning into the Great White Way. The immigrant ships dumped thousands every day at Castle Garden; his tenements filled to bursting. If his ambition to establish himself in the front rank of English society soared high, he had millions to back it.

Why should he not, then, buy England's loveliest country estate from England's richest Duke? And what if the testy old Duke demanded six million dollars for Cliveden? If London journals and Cliveden could establish Astor in the rank he desired, the price didn't matter.

Cliveden (pronounced Cleeveden or Cleefden or Cliffden, but not Cliveden!) was the noblest country place in all England excepting only royal Windsor; "Few estates within the Four Seas would better suit a cultivated taste and well-filled cash-box." The great house, high above the Thames, overlooked the dales and groves of Buckinghamshire and Berkshire and many another famed country place, including Windsor. But its peculiar glory was in the noble terraces, exquisite groves, and hanging gardens above Cliveden Reach — the loveliest half-mile on the Thames. Cliveden House itself hardly matched its surroundings — a pseudo-Italian palace, vast and heavy, described by some as a monstrosity in the English countryside.

The sale to Astor was understood to include all the contents of the great house. But the Duke was as contentious as the new owner. He demanded several art treasures that had been in-

cluded in the bill of sale by mistake, he said. Astor obliged, but when the Duke demanded the visitors' book, bearing the signatures of the royalty and nobility, Astor stood his ground despite the hubbub raised by Westminster and the Grosvenor clan.

The American disliked the gaze of the public, which had been accustomed on country jaunts to peer through an iron-grilled gate, so he had the gate pulled down. Around the entire estate he threw a "hideous wall covered with broken glass" and then forbade boating parties to land on his riverside property to picnic in the woods. All this aroused the indignation of lovers of the countryside. "No reasonable man," protested one gentleman, "wishes to prevent Americans or citizens of other States from inhabiting our country. But if they wish to do so, their first duty is to show decent respect for the customs of their adopted country. Failing this, it becomes a duty to ask whether there is no way of teaching them good manners."

Astor's response was to enclose a spring of water which for a century had been open to the public. One could view the majestic grounds and gardens of Cliveden henceforth only as an invited guest. The elect could see the world's largest private fountain, rivalled only by the Kaiser's. "The Fountain of Love" was made of Siena marble, enormous quantities of which were discarded to provide a perfect match. Finest white Sicilian marble was used for three statues of a woman and Cupid, the final episode showing her recumbent. Rare and beautiful water plants were grown under the shell. This fountain, it was said, cost Astor $250,000.

After buying Cliveden, he discovered an enclave. Without notice, the story is told, Astor presented himself to the owner. Flourishing a chequebook, he asked brusquely: "What is your price?"

For once a poor but proud Englishman had his revenge. "I am not selling my land," he announced. "And I will not sell it at any price to a man who offensively assumes that money (enough of it) must needs buy anything and everything."

Equipped with Cliveden in the country, Astor cast about for a town house. He had rented Lansdowne House, containing a fine collection of pictures, for $25,000 a year, but he wished to

own a place of his own. He bought one of those gloomily aristocratic mansions on Carlton House Terrace overlooking St. James's Park. This he had done over, with exquisite panelling, a grand staircase lavishly gilded, a dining-table forty feet long, magnificent tapestries. At the opening of his new home he invited the notables then in London — Prince Alexander of Teck, Ambassador Hay, the Grand Duke Michael, Earl Cadogan, the Lord Mayor, and a score of dukes, earls, and counts. Paderewski, Melba, Pol Plançon, and other artists amused the gilded company. The enormous dining-table, the splendid tapestries, the massive silver candelabra, the white and yellow orchids, the silver bowls with fruit, added the lavish American touch to a dinner that was the height of perfection — for Astor himself, no mean gourmet, secured the highest talents of the best Continental chefs for the appeasement of his appetite.

In 1897 Astor opened a jewel of a building along the Embankment near the Temple, built in Tudor style of the famous Portland stone whose weathering is one of the beauties of London. A large gilded weathervane in the shape of Columbus's caravel hinted that this structure, the Astor Estate Office, owed its revenue to the New World. The hall had floors of inlaid marble, jasper, and porphyry, and the staircase was adorned with figures from Astor's novels. The great hall on the second floor, more than seventy feet long, had a high hammer-beam roof of carved Spanish mahogany and walls of pencilled cedar. Portraits of the Founder, William Backhouse, John Jacob III, and himself hung on the walls. "There is no more curious room in London," declared an architect, "than this hall which was intended by its creator to be a sort of temple of culture and expresses in a curious way his own tastes in art and literature."

The Founder, it can be imagined, would have been horrified to find the plaque stating: "John Jacob Astor Estate" on this structure whose reputed cost of $1,500,000 was nearly as much as he had made from fifty years of fur-trading. Old John Jacob had thought any convenient brick building good enough for a business office; his son had managed the estate from an unpretentious two-story brick structure on Prince Street in New York.

The estate office was opened with a tea attended by Ambassador and Mrs. Hay, the Duchesses of Cleveland, St. Albans, and Buckingham, and a host of ladies and gentlemen. Looking at the stairs of marble and malachite, the Duchess of Cleveland could not refrain from remarking: " Yes, it is far finer than mine at Battle Abbey whose steps are spoiled by the marks left by the Knights' spurs."

The Duchess expressed the undercurrent of hostility among the genteel and not too rich upper class that attached itself to this Astor in whatever he did. As for the lower classes, John Burns, who had battled his way up from Battersea to the London County Council and Parliament, gave expression to their contempt: " I can stand a decent duke or a militant marquess, but I can't endure the miserable and ungentlemanly conduct of a new millionaire."

Such criticisms never disturbed Astor. He had armed himself with England's greatest country house, with a magnificent town house, with the finest estate office in the world, and a newspaper and magazines. These were the outward trappings of wealth, breeding, culture, and status — and that was enough. He was presented to the Prince of Wales, who took a fancy to this peculiar, moody, sensitive, aspiring American. He asked only a nod from the Prince to assuage wounds inflicted upon him by his own fellow countrymen, only to be admitted to the Prince's Carlton Club to forget the provincial elegance of the Knickerbocker and Union Clubs in far-away New York.

Although he took no pleasure in entertaining, he continued to give enormously expensive parties. Satisfied that persons of sufficient rank and dignity were there, he would survey these assemblages for the æsthetic appreciation they afforded, and then retire to his own chambers to seek comfort in solitude, the loneliest of all mortals.

On one occasion he had marched in at eleven p.m., just as the party was getting under way, and had announced that he was about to retire and would expect his guests to leave at one o'clock. Nor let any man assume that he meant one minute after one, for orders were sacred in Astor's life, as an unfortunate lady discovered when she visited Cliveden.

After dinner Astor asked what each of his guests intended to do that afternoon. Write some letters, she said. When she had finished them all, she strolled out into the garden. A servant in livery hastened after her to say that Mr. Astor expected people to do what they had appointed to do and she was to go back inside and write. "In that case you may call the carriage," she replied with spirit; "I shan't stay a moment longer."

"I'm sorry, madam," said the servant stiffly, "but Mr. Astor doesn't allow the carriage to be called at a time that's not been appointed." In desperation she carried her bag down the road out of Cliveden to Taplow — to assert the fact that she was a free woman and not yet living in a gilded penitentiary.

A sudden pique caused Astor to insert in his *Pall Mall Gazette* on July 3, 1900 a notice:

"We are desired to make known that the presence of Captain Sir Berkeley Milne of the Naval and Military Club, Piccadilly, at Mr. Astor's concert last Thursday evening, was uninvited."

Had Astor turned his back on the Prince of Wales, he could have raised no greater commotion in the West End. Milne (later the unfortunate Admiral who had the bad luck to allow the *Goeben* and *Breslau* to escape into the Dardanelles at the opening of the First World War) was a distinguished officer, member of the best clubs, former commander of the royal yacht *Osborne*. Astor had insulted not only this dignitary, but his club as well.

Milne had been dining with the Countess of Orford, who invited him to accompany her to Astor's musicale. As he entered, Astor looked at him coldly, refused to shake hands, and asked his name. He replied he had come with the Countess of Orford's party.

"I have not had the pleasure of your acquaintance," said Astor evenly, "and I must ask you to leave. I will insert a notice in the newspapers about this." Covered with confusion, the Captain retired and wrote a note from his club apologizing and expressing the hope that the matter would be dropped.

Milne's friends were furious; the Duke of York (the future George V) and fellow officers in the Army and Navy felt that

they too had been insulted. The Prince of Wales ostentatiously invited him to the royal box at the theatre the following evening. Astor departed for Marienbad to take the cure, followed by imprecations from Mayfair. The *Saturday Review* rallied to the defence of the Captain, "the latchet of whose shoe Astor with all his millions is unworthy to untie. We only regret that the gallant servant of Her Majesty so far forgot his dignity as to accept a second-hand invitation to the house of the purse-proud American whose dollars could not save him from the contempt of his countrymen. Mr. Astor wishes his entertainments to be exclusive. His desire is likely to be granted in future beyond his expectations."

The members of the Carlton Club, led by the Prince, intimated that only an apology would save Astor from being dropped. To that he bowed with the following words:

"We desire to express regret that a paragraph which appeared in this column July 2 with regard to the presence of Sir Berkeley Milne at Mr. Astor's concert the preceding Thursday evening should have been published under a misapprehension of the exact circumstances. Explanations of a completely categorical kind now show that Sir Berkeley Milne's presence was due to a misunderstanding that entirely absolves him from any individual discourtesy."

It was about this time that the *Daily Mail* published a paragraph about "Mr. Astor's strange dinner party" at which he had entertained forty guests around a segment of a California redwood to win a wager of five hundred pounds. Complaining that he had been "held up to public ridicule," he retained the former Solicitor General, Sir Edward Clarke, to press suit for libel against Alfred Harmsworth (later Lord Northcliffe), who in turn retained the former Solicitor General of Ireland, the Right Honourable Edward H. Carson. Since he had come to England, Astor stated, "certain personal and offensive paragraphs from time to time appeared about him."

The Lord Chief Justice suggested that an apology was in order whenever a gentleman had been annoyed. "I cannot fail to see," he commented, "that there is a growing fashion, perhaps copied from the press with which Mr. Astor is better ac-

quainted than we are" (laughter) "of publishing personal paragraphs which are annoying." The *Daily Mail*, while not admitting libel, was willing to apologize. Counsel for the offending paper declared his client had no wish to annoy, "though some people are annoyed by these things and others are not" (laughter).

Harmsworth's *Evening News* followed up: "Mr. Astor is a cultured American who does us the honour to prefer our company to that of his own countrymen. His remembrance of the courteous, polished manner in which his native newspapers deal with him makes him apparently a highly censorious critic. The malice in the dinner party paragraph is so subtle as to escape any ordinary reader but it did not escape Mr. Astor. According to Sir Edward Clarke the inference drawn from the paragraph would be that Mr. Astor allowed the information to be supplied to the press. This awful crime would not appear heinous to any one of Mr. Astor's nationality."

Quarrels and contentions were of the essence of this strange man who traced his descent from that contentious officer, General John Armstrong. Alas for him, he lived before the day of public-relations counsellors. Vain and humourless, friendless and lonely, he grew to hate London society as much as he had loathed New York's. He lived in and by symbols: his great wealth and his own fine taste, he felt, should assure him a certain pre-eminence. When he found that London was as cold to his claims as New York, he decided the only buttress to the recognition he craved was that which the King could give. He aspired, poor fellow, to be a lord. By 1899 intimations of his desire had reached the press, which reminded him that since the time when William III had showered British titles on Dutch republicans, that honour had been reserved for English-born subjects. "A baronet or knight Mr. Astor could be, and if he is ready to pay there is no doubt that he will find no difficulty in negotiating the matter," it was observed. But he had no desire to be known merely as Sir William. It must be Lord Astor or nothing.

In 1899 he took the decisive step and was gazetted a British subject. Two days after the intelligence reached New York, a

hooting, jeering crowd surged up Broadway behind an effigy placarded: "Astor the Traitor," which was burned in Times Square. *Town Topics* lashed out at "the richest man that America ever owned and that disowned America." Complaining of "amazing caddishness and snobbishness," the society scandal sheet declared "the ultra-rich men of America have recently become unduly obstreperous in their show of contempt for the country, its ways and its people." The popular press — that section of it which was anti-British — raged against Astor. To him it must have seemed a bitter-sweet offering to his own worth, a confirmation of his new allegiance.

Reports appeared that Astor was to sell out his Manhattan realty, that an offer of $150,000,000 had been made, and that a corporation would take over the British-held portion of the family holdings. Henry Morgenthau crossed the Atlantic to make an offer, but Astor most likely decided that no investment in England offered such returns as New York real estate. He was obliged by law, however, to resign as director of the Gallatin and Astor national banks, and a few years later was dropped from the Lackawanna board for non-attendance.

His switch in nationality must have mortified the faithful *Tribune,* which had declared, a few years before, that "he is a loyal citizen of the United States wherever he may be." That journal was concerned that other editors "appear to labor under the delusion that denunciations of Mr. William Waldorf Astor are proper and edifying."

The fact was that he made little effort to conceal contempt for his native land. It was doubtful if hatred could have been more bitterly expressed than by his gift of the battle flag of the U.S. frigate *Chesapeake* to the Royal United Service Museum. The *Chesapeake* had been taken by H.M.S. *Shannon,* a heavier ship, in a battle off Boston in the War of 1812 made memorable by Captain Lawrence's command: "Don't give up the ship!"

The American press blazed with patriotic anger. "Even Englishmen," declared a London dispatch to the *World,* blushed at this "exhibition of execrable taste. Everywhere one hears the opinion expressed that it is a deliberately malicious affront to Mr. Astor's former countrymen. Astor took no interest in the

A cartoon from Life *published at the time William Waldorf Astor became a British citizen, expressing the resentment and disapproval of his action felt by his former countrymen*

flag until he heard there was a plan afoot to buy it for America."

Hearst's *Evening Journal* wrote of "storms of rebuke for the expatriate" because of his latest act of hatred "toward the country that gave him birth and which has supplied him with the millions in money through which alone he has been able to secure recognition in England, the land of his adoption." The Philadelphia *North American,* devoting three columns to pictures of Astor, the flag, and his English estates, asserted that "this man, whose wealth comes from the country he repudiated, has offered another gratuitous insult to the United States."

His gibe at America as a land "not fit for a gentleman to live in" was recalled, and his statement that "America is good enough for any man who has to make a livelihood, though why traveled people of independent means should remain there more than a week is not readily to be comprehended." At another time, still smarting from the "Golden Canvass," he had said: "Politics is closed to a man who will not seek votes in the Irish slums; it isn't easy to see why people of independent means remain there."

If the newly pledged British subject thought his gift would advance his ambitions, he was mistaken, said the *North American's* London correspondent: "The powers that be in this country, whether at Court or in Downing Street, understand quite well that to confer a peerage on this gentleman would, perhaps, do more after this episode to weaken their cherished entente cordiale with America than any other small mistake they might make."

Henry Cabot Lodge reported to President Roosevelt: "I had a long talk with Balfour in London. I was interested to find that he resented Astor's conduct about the flag as much as we, and has the same opinion."

Roosevelt had developed quite an antipathy for the great Manhattan landlord and English gentleman. On one of Astor's infrequent visits to New York, he had asked friends and acquaintances to meet him. "The other day," Roosevelt noted, "I was asked to dinner to meet 'Mr. Astor.' At first I thought it was Jack Astor and accepted. For Jack Astor, with all his faults, is an American. But when I found it was William Wal-

dorf Astor, I wrote again refusing, pleading inability to attend. I am not going to join in any way in greeting Willie Astor."

About the time he renounced American citizenship Astor wrote an *apologia pro vita sua* which appeared in his *Pall Mall Magazine* of June 1899. "I never wished," he wrote, "to live at Brookdale where Hawthorne went to learn that wealth is nothing, nor should I have been content at Walden with the contemplation of nature and a daily plate of Thoreau's bean soup." The very Founders of the Republic, he said, felt "that it was democratic and virtuous to be poor and aristocratic and un-American to be rich." The theorists who elaborated the federal government believed that large fortunes were contrary to austere tenets of republican simplicity, and they passed laws against entails, primogeniture, and hereditary successions. It was in such a milieu that his great-grandfather had had to struggle for wealth and it was because of republican distaste for concentrated wealth that Astoria fell from his grasp.

How America had changed! "The development of the 'plutocrats' can hardly be within the intention of the Founders of the Republic: neither are the tramps who number close upon 200,000 and who have their annual 'congress' at which the moral and physical filth of the land assembles to discuss its campaign for the ensuing year."

The republican system not only failed to prevent accumulation of great wealth but impoverished the very descendants of the Founders. Half the families who fought in the Revolution are now extinct, others have sunk to be "mere tillers of the soil." In six states the Order of the Cincinnati has perished. They retain one ten-thousandth of the lands they held at the end of the Revolutionary War.

It seemed that Astor was penning a rebuke to the Founding Fathers for not having perpetuated entail, primogeniture, and hereditary estates. As for himself, he could not help remembering that "as early as the days of Benjamin Franklin there were not wanting thinkers who questioned the wisdom of submitting complex and delicate problems of society and statecraft to the decision of the multitude."

His *Pall Mall Magazine* article was notable for his statement of faith and for a marvellous genealogical chart which showed that the writer was descended from the Spanish Counts of Astorga, one of whom had fought " Yusuf Tashafin, King of the Almoravideo of Morocco," and another of whom had been a personal friend of the Spanish Queen. Later generations of these Astorian forebears passed over to southern France, where an early chief styled himself Jean Jacques d'Astorg. Astor himself made no comment on the beautifully embellished chart except to state that it was a Jean Jaques d'Astorg who fled France at the revocation of the Edict of Nantes to seek refuge across the Rhine. But it was evident that he found comfort in the assertion that Spanish noble blood had preceded that of the humble butcher's boy of Waldorf.

Town Topics published a letter reputedly from the current Comte d'Astorga at Pau ridiculing Astor's genealogy. " An appalling mixture of facts some of them actually turned upside down," he commented. Nowhere in the family records, said the Count, was there a Jean Jacques d'Astorg " born in 1664 " who fled to Germany. And how did Astor or his genealogist account for the remarkable metamorphosis of " d'Astorga " into " Astor "?

Lothrop Withington, a genealogist of some renown, checked Astor's chart and reported in the columns of the New York *Sun* that his own exhaustive inquiry had discovered no records existing in Germany which proved or even claimed that the progenitors of the Founder were of noble French descent. Inquiry in France indicated that no member of the d'Astorg nobility had fled after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. On the contrary the d'Astorgs remained and enjoyed high honours under His Most Catholic Majesty.

More serious was Withington's statement that Astor's genealogist had falsified the date of the marriage in France of the Jacques d'Astorg who was said to have fled to Germany. This date had been pushed back thirty years in order to connect French and German pedigrees. Perhaps, the *Sun* pointed out, William Waldorf was a descendant of Isaac Astorg, a Jewish

doctor of Carcassone, who died in 1305. As for Astor, "it may be assumed that he was victimized by some supposed genealogical authority on which he relied."

The more plebeian *World* hooted: "Truly a career of genuine aristocracy is becoming harder and harder to those of our fellow-countrymen who follow it."

The *World* reported court gossip from London that the Prince of Wales was none too pleased with Astor and his pretensions. "Not Mr. Astor," he was reported to have said, as he drew his pencil through that name which appeared on a list of guests invited to meet him at a house party in Scotland. "Not Mr. Astor, he bores me."

He was coupled with other Americans who had renounced their citizenship to become British subjects: Benedict Arnold, Judah P. Benjamin, the Confederate statesman, and A. Oakey Hall, the Tammany mayor at the time of the Tweed exposé.

The assassination of President McKinley, "a plain man of the people who fought for a high tariff in behalf of American Labour," evoked Astor's horror in another *Pall Mall* article. McKinley had recognized "the ties that link the English-speaking race," a great step forward in Anglo-American unity, for "the progress of modern civilization had rarely sustained a severer shock than resulted from the severance of the American Colonies."

As for the anarchists who had killed McKinley, he had a cure. Ship them to Alaska, which could serve as a Yankee Siberia. "From several quarters," he argued, "we are assured that the mere killing of Anarchists will not eradicate them or their principles. A cogent answer to such declarations is present in the result of those repressive measures which in Russia has done so much to draw the teeth of Nihilism. Few will deny that conditions have improved in that country since the years between 1880 and 1885 when not only the Imperial Family but every high official stood in danger. . . . A loathsome disease in the body politic called for the knife. The measures resorted to were simple and the result bears token to their efficacy. Military execution dealt with every member of a Nihilist association, and his relatives — father, wife, brothers, children — were

transported to stations in Siberia from which escape was impractical."

Such straight-line thinking characterized Astor. There was a prompt cure for all evils. America displeased him, so he moved to England. Criticism displeased him, so he sued for libel. He wished to be acknowledged as an English gentleman, so he bought himself the outward attributes — Cliveden, a house in Carlton House Terrace, the Astor Estate office on the embankment. He wanted his writings published, so he bought a newspaper and founded a magazine.

C. Lewis Hind, the English critic, termed him a mediævalist and said that "in each of his literary efforts his mind rolled back a few hundred or a few thousand years."

That was certainly true of his Balkameh. The manager of the Maison Roque in Paris was responsible for that story in the *Pall Mall Magazine*. He called Astor's attention to the irregular cutting of a ruby he wore. Therein might be contained a message from the past; a few Asiatics still write through stone. That winter the curator of the Ghizeh Museum at Cairo took an extraordinary interest in the gem, conjecturing three of seven "significants."

"My interest was now as thoroughly aroused as it could be in a subject which seemed little less than absurd," wrote Astor. He headed for Rome to have his old friend Professor Vaini examine the stone.

Three days later, "I was startled at the change the interval had wrought in his appearance. He looked like one who had passed through a severe illness and suddenly aged half a dozen years. 'I have done with your ring,' the old man said. 'It has been so many centuries unused as a medium of communication that its accumulated power is almost killing.'"

The professor received a cheque for ten thousand francs for his manuscript translating the stone's message. Imagine Astor's surprise to receive a note from the professor's secretary a few days later saying that his master had died at Subiaco; he had collapsed as if "the brain had been struck by lightning."

The manuscript which had had so extraordinary an effect on the old savant Astor published in the *Pall Mall Magazine* "for

the information of those few who know and love the curious arts." Its first paragraph read:

"In the hundredth year of the Lion in Heaven. The bird Splendour of the Morning spread his wings, and mounted with tireless flight, saying to the Magicians in the realm of Sheba, 'Declare ye unto the Queen that I salute her with the words, "O, Balkameh, thou art of perfect beauty." Moreover, ye who understand the science of the seventh power, shall bid her know that the King whom soothsayers call Prince of Wisdom, and who is a refuge alike from storm and fear, awaits her.' So at the voice of the bird, the magicians rose to uncover their feet, and the daughters of music were silent."

"I have frequently sought the confidence of the dreamstone," Astor added, "by holding it for hours in meditative silence but necessarily in vain. It is obviously unlikely that an unimaginative man of affairs could attune himself to mysteries so subtle and elusive. More than once I have invited a repetition of Professor Vaini's observations by offering to submit my ruby to the experiments of acquaintances whose sensitive mood might render them receptive subjects. On such occasions it has seemed an evident duty to mention the tragic fate of my Italian friend to whom the 'Glad Tidings of Baal' were as lightning. Then, to my chagrin, the listener's flashing interest invariably fades, and the dreamstone of Balkameh's love, which her lips may have touched and inspired — remains silent."

Stories in the same mystic vein appeared from time to time in his *Pall Mall Magazine*. These were bound together in a book, *Pharaoh's Daughter and Other Stories*, published in 1900. They included: "The Ghosts of Austerlitz," "M. de Neron" (Nero in modern dress), "The Red Dwarf of Rabenstein," "The Wraith of Cliveden Reach," "Under the Black Flag," "Brabantio's Love," "Cliefden Lights and Shades." "The volume," Astor ordered his publishers, "shall not be printed, placed on sale, advertised, or even get into the United States if the author can prevent it."

The loneliness of the man who mused over Oriental lore in Egypt and consulted masters of the curious arts in Rome was intensified when the only living soul who knew him well, his

wife, died on December 22, 1894. She was, as *Town Topics* remarked, a "typical Philadelphia woman," devoted to her children, domestic, indisposed by poor health to much exertion. She had never entered with gusto into the memorable battle of the Mrs. Astors at Newport. In London she had been introduced to the diplomatic set in the Queen's drawing-room, a feat of some import in view of the repugnance of the Duchess of Buccleugh, Mistress of the Robes, to Jews and Americans. Mrs. Astor was survived by four children: Waldorf, fifteen, Pauline, fourteen, John Jacob V, eight, and Gwendolyn, five.

Her body was sent across the Atlantic for services at Trinity Chapel. The American branch of the Astor family refused to lower the bars of ostracism even in the presence of death. No lineal Astor was present. But the fashionables of New York and Philadelphia united nevertheless to pay their final respects to the other Mrs. Astor.

While the body was en route across the ocean, *the* Mrs. Astor and her daughter-in-law, Mrs. John Jacob IV, attended the Opera. Two days before the funeral Mrs. John Jacob IV led the cotillion at the Assembly Ball; on the evening of the funeral she was in Philadelphia for another ball.

A furore raged across the face of society. Some regarded the American Astors as callous in the extreme and fallen far from the canons of good taste and breeding. Others replied that, after all, they had not been invited to the funeral and cited the action of William Waldorf in giving a big dinner in London when *the* Mrs. Astor's daughter, Mrs. James Roosevelt Roosevelt, lay dead.

Astor himself was his usual cold and secretive self. He did not go near his house, still maintained at 8 East Thirty-third Street, and refused visitors at his suite in his new hotel, the Netherland. He returned to England, more taciturn and morose than ever, known to his children only as an austere, aloof, and wretchedly unhappy man who wandered through the vast spaces of Cliveden House or the majestic halls of his Carlton House Terrace mansion intent only on his own inturned and tortured soul. Fortunately Waldorf, Pauline, and John Jacob V were usually away at school, and Gwendolyn, a sickly girl who

died a few years later of tuberculosis, was under the charge of a platoon of nurses, governesses, and doctors.

When the Boer War came, soon after he had cut off his ties of allegiance to the United States, William Waldorf responded magnificently with gifts of nearly $100,000, including $25,000 for a quick-firing battery (his cousin John Jacob IV at this time was giving a similar battery to the American government for use in the Philippines). To Oxford, where his son Waldorf was a student, he gave $50,000 and then another $50,000, gaining from Lord Curzon of Kedleston acknowledgment as "that most generous American gentleman." Princely gifts were scattered by this first open-handed Astor: $50,000 to Cambridge, $100,000 to the University of London, $50,000 for four London charities; $25,000 to the Gordon Memorial College at Khartoum; $50,000 to Maidenhead Cottage Hospital (near Cliveden) on the occasion of Waldorf's twenty-first birthday.

Such generosity astounded American observers of the family. This man, who seemed the most unsocial of that long line of unsocial Astors, on whose head coals of fire had been heaped for his anti-Americanism, was showering gifts upon his adopted country. In England the cynical believed that such largesse was appropriate in one who had expressed a desire to be ennobled. But how could one really aspire to be a nobleman without a castle? Very well, there were castles on the market. Which was the oldest, most historic, best located?

Early in 1903 Astor bought Hever Castle in Kent, reputed birthplace of Anne Boleyn. This castle certainly had its romantic note — it was said that the spirit of Henry VIII's unhappy Queen wandered up and down its windy gallery, moaning. On stormy nights one might hear doleful love-songs of Normandy, sung in a minor key. Here Henry had courted Anne; an oak-panelled chamber was pointed out as the scene of the love-making. In the words of Edmund B. D'Auvergne, historian of English castles, Hever perpetuated "the memory of lives and fortunes blasted by the blackest scoundrel that ever wore a crown." From here Cardinal Wolsey, pander to the King, had fetched Anne to play her brief role. To dignify her, he had

raised her father to the peerage; here the King had seduced her sister.

It was said that Astor spent ten million dollars on Hever Castle. He changed the course of the River Eden to drain marshland and create a lake; he built a new bridge, a power house, deer park, model farm, Italian gardens, a village to house his guests. So modern were the improvements that villagers jested that Anne in disgust had abandoned her four-century haunt in protest.

In all seriousness Astor invited the Psychical Research Society to investigate Anne's ghost. Patiently those gentlemen kept night watch during Christmas week for several years, but they never heard Anne singing her mournful lays.

A subway connected the Tudor-style model village with the castle; the piggeries were done in expensive oak, the cowsheds were adorned with chocolate and white tiles, the floor in the dairy made in mosaic by workmen imported from Italy. A wall twelve feet high was thrown about the entire grounds to keep the curious from peering in.

Crusty old English gentlemen who disliked castles with modern plumbing and heating systems cried out in protest. One of them wrote:

"I can hardly bear to tell in detail of the things that this man did to Hever Castle in Kent: of the diverting of a river, the bringing of fully grown trees and rocks to mask from the public gaze a castle which was historic but long had been a farmhouse, to which any courteous stranger might be admitted. He built on to it and altered it and had costly sham antiques made; and then enclosed the whole within high walls and huge electrically-operated gates; so that when his motor car came, the door opened silently and closed smoothly and swiftly almost upon the back of the car as it entered."

The possessor of Hever Castle turned an anxious eye upon his oldest son, who by rights of primogeniture would some day be head of the senior branch of the House of Astor. But Waldorf, product of Eton and Oxford, who loved sports and the passing show, had few ties with the strange, crochety man who lived

in bitterness in ages long since past. Their relations were almost formal, for their interests were divergent, their habits of thought utterly different. Astor hoped that his son would marry into the nobility, but even that was denied him when in 1906 Waldorf married a lively young woman, Nannie Langhorne, who was erasing the memory of a broken American romance by riding after English foxes. Nannie was not only American, a bitter pill for the elder Astor, but a divorcée as well. To boot she was devoid of those Victorian virtues of deference, respect for authority, courtliness, and love of the antique. She was pert, flip, gay, and possessed of a sharp tongue that clashed with the older Astor's caustic temper. Still remembering what was due an oldest son, Astor handed over Cliveden to Waldorf and Nancy, a brilliant setting for an ambitious young woman and a modern young man interested in politics.

Two years earlier his only surviving daughter, Pauline, had disappointed him, too, by marrying a commoner, Lieutenant Colonel Herbert Spender-Clay. "A more typical Englishman it would be hard to find," the *Times* wrote later. Unfortunately it was denied to Astor to know that the daughter of this union would one day be sister-in-law of the Queen of England.

Astor replaced Cliveden with a villa on the cliffs at Sorrento, overlooking the Bay of Naples. The villa contained spacious halls, marble staircases, and lofty rooms. On the estate was the church-monastery of San Giorgio, dating from the thirteenth century, containing seventy rooms with subterranean passages to grottoes by the sea. He lavished a million or so on furnishings, antiques, a Roman garden, Greek and Roman statuary, marble benches — re-creating an estate which a gentleman of the second century might well have enjoyed. Looking out upon as noble a view as the world provides — white villas in the groves, the deep-blue Mediterranean, the islands in the Bay of Naples, the distant city, smoking Vesuvius — Astor imagined himself an old Roman patrician. The world indeed was now remote. His newspapers in England ran themselves, his immense landholdings in New York were under the watchful care of Charles A. Peabody, Jr., he himself was as separated from them as if he were living in the ancient glory that was Rome.

Aloof as he was, New York's biggest realty-owner nevertheless kept a sharp eye on his estate. His vanity and revenge had already been clothed in the immense and flamboyant Waldorf Hotel on Fifth Avenue. This he followed with the Netherland, successor to the quiet, aristocratic Cambridge. The Netherland was for those fastidious folk who did not care to live in the huge goldfish bowl of the Waldorf-Astoria. At Fifth Avenue and Fifty-ninth Street it soared, overlooking the southeast corner of the Park. Its entrance was unostentatious, but within were carved and panelled mahogany and walnut, dark marble, bronze, and onyz. The Netherland was the first hotel to have telephones in every room and a central switchboard. The Waldorf-Astoria was all splash and bustle and display; the Netherland all dignity, restraint, and good taste. The upper reaches of visiting provincials loved it; "everybody" was at the Waldorf, the discriminating élite at the Netherland.

In 1900 Astor announced that Longacre Square would be honoured with a great hostelry on the west side of Broadway between Forty-fourth and Forty-fifth Streets, where fifty years before cows had grazed. This $2,500,000 Astor Hotel, to rise ten stories, would transform nondescript Longacre Square into the undoubted centre of the city's night life. Hardly was the Astor opened in 1904 when the *Times* decided to abandon Park Row and move uptown. The name of Longacre was changed to Times Square, property values boomed, and all the Astors, American and English, were content, for they owned entire blocks west of Broadway from Forty-third to Fifty-first Streets.

Other property-owners admired Astor's neat trick in opening a drive in the rear of his new hotel for service wagons and to provide a permanent air shaft for the rooms fronting west. The narrow alley he gave to the city and so he not only provided a service entrance and air space for his hotel but escaped paying taxes on the strip.

Other notable buildings erected under his regency were the 182-foot Exchange Court Building at Broadway and New Street, notable as one of the first of the Wall Street skyscrapers, and two huge apartment houses on upper Broadway, the Apthorp (named for his mother's forebears) and the Belnord.

England saw little of him. In the summers he was at Hever Castle, for a few weeks of the season his Carlton House Terrace mansion was opened for magnificent receptions, in the winter he was at Sorrento. His son in 1910 became a Member of Parliament. To aid Waldorf's political ambitions as well as to further his own still-cherished aspirations for a patent of nobility, he bought the *Observer*, the most powerful of conservative Sunday newspapers. J. L. Garvin was installed as editor of both the *Observer* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

In the autumn of his life, despite prodigal expenditures on vast estates and public gifts, William Waldorf Astor seemed as far from his goal of a title as ever. The Queen had died; the Prince who had forced his apology to Sir Berkeley Milne came to the throne as Edward VII, reigned, and died. George V mounted the throne, but still there was no mention of Astor's name in New Year's or Birthday Honours. Fortunately for him, the World War then broke out. Astor snapped to attention, loosened his purse-strings, and proved the most open-handed of Englishmen. In the opening weeks of the war he gave $125,000 to the Prince of Wales's fund, $80,000 to Lord Rothschild's Red Cross fund, $25,000 to Queen Mary's fund for women, another $20,000 to the Red Cross, $25,000 to the *Daily Telegraph's* fund for bands for the New Army, large amounts to the *Times* and the St. John funds. Later in the year he gave $125,000 for officers' families, and in 1915 another $100,000 to the Red Cross.

Such largesse pulled stolid Britishers up from their chairs in a cheer for good old Astor. It was mighty lucky, many said, that American millions were at the disposal of King and country. Waldorf, unfit for active military service, nevertheless clothed himself in a uniform for home duty; John Jacob V rushed to the front to acquire the first wound in the annals of the Astor male line. History now was in a hurry. Many a new title was to bloom from Flanders fields and from the financial sacrifices of men too old to shed their blood.

CHAPTER *ii*

Landlord — British Lord

On Empire Day 1911, at a fancy-dress ball at Claridge's, Prime Minister Herbert Asquith and Arthur Balfour, leader of His Majesty's Opposition, stood in the centre of the ballroom. The flower of England's aristocracy surged around them in costumes ranging from Dynastic Egyptian to Louis XV. At the stroke of midnight a way was cleared through the fantastic throng for the figure of a peer in robes of state, bearing on his coronet the legend: "499: just one more vacancy."

It was William Waldorf Astor, making another bid to be ennobled. Lords and ladies and bedizened commoners stood agape for a moment and then burst into rounds of applause while the Prime Minister and Balfour joined in the laughter at this vagary of "a mock peer in tinsel."

In that same year Astor began to refer to himself as "The Honourable" — by what right Englishmen knew not, unless it was an allusion to his having been a member of the New York State Senate.

But these were bare times for loyal Tories. It was not likely that Asquith or any other Liberal premier would ennoble Astor for a House of Lords already filled with Conservatives despite his sonnet apostrophizing the London fog as "an enveloping goddess in opaque raiment."

Then came the war and the mobilization of Astorian moneybags for the commonweal. The closing days of 1915 were gloomy. Debacle had been averted on the Western Front by the arrival of the New Armies, but the loss of life was appalling.

It was going to be a long war, in which America must be courted by every means to swing the balance. And if one of the wealthiest men in England dearly wished to be a lord, it was no time to consider the objections of fussy old Tories or radical Liberals. So King's Honours for January 1, 1916 announced that William Waldorf Astor had been issued a patent of nobility. Only a month before, the High Court of Justice had held that an act of 1870 endowed naturalized citizens with all the rights of the native-born.

The peerage had been bestowed "in recognition of his princely contributions to every conceivable form of philanthropic enterprise during the near quarter of a century" of his British residence. His journals had given powerful support to the Unionist Party, which had assumed a weighty voice in the new Coalition Cabinet.

Cloaked at last in ermine-trimmed red velvet robes and with a three-cornered beaver hat over his brow, Astor advanced toward the Garter King of Arms in the House of Lords, preceded by his two sponsors. The clerk droned:

"George V by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, of the British Dominions Beyond the Seas, King, Defender of the Faith, to all lords spiritual and temporal and all other our subjects whatsoever to whom these presents shall come, greeting: — Know ye, that we of our especial grace, certain knowledge, and mere motion do by these presents advance, create and prefer our trusty couzin, William Waldorf Astor, to the state, degree, style, dignity, title and honour of the Baron Astor of Hever Castle in the County of Kent on this 16th day of April, 1916."

The new Baron then turned with his sponsors and followed the Garter King of Arms back to the Barons' bench, where they took seats, and then rose three times in their places, doffed their hats, and bowed to the Lord High Chancellor, who acknowledged each bow by dipping his own three-cornered beaver.

The *Outlook* declared the honour was "just a recognition of the active share he has taken in the life of his adopted country." The *Chronicle* held his honour the most exciting of all the King's new peerages. But such deference was not shared universally.

"If it be urged," said the *New Witness*, "that it is highly desirable at the present time to conciliate American friendship, we can only say that they know little the American temperament who imagine that such an effect will be produced. The only effect of the elevation will be to evoke Americans to renewed anger in America against the Astor family."

The *Spectator* was even more outspoken: "There is a widespread conviction that the grant of honours in exchange for money, though the transactions are disguised, amounts to corruption — a form of corruption which if it is allowed to continue, will bring democracy into putrefaction."

From across the sea came a sonnet, written by Lord Astor's own cousin — and his counterpart in many ways — John Armstrong Chaloner. It was headed:

THE FUTURE DUKE OF ASTEROID

Or Cousin Willie

Bravo! Cousin Willie! *Punch 'em* once again!
Buy another paper, and then, keep on!
And show these "bloomin' perishin'" Englishmen
You're bound to win the game you're bent upon.
And when you're made the Duke of Asteroid —
The Duke of Astor'd be too big for you —
See that a cleaver's on your arm deployed —
A butcher's cleaver thereon doth spring in view.
The Butcher of Waldorf's son a genius was —
No greater Merchant Prince did ever live —
So of this genius give the natural cause
And axe and chopping-block all honor give!
That my blue-blood mingled with thy humble strain
Doth please me much — I *love* the people plain.

Any tendency, however, of snobs to sneer at the ennoblement of a man whose ancestors had merely butchered animals instead of human beings was cut short by England's own dire plight. For that matter, the descendant of John Jacob need not have felt any inferiority to many of his fellow peers.

Charles A. Beard said of his peerage that it was acquired "by the usual method and [he] landed in the House of Lords among a host of English cotton-spinners, soap magnates, tobacconists, journalists and successful brokers."

To at least two persons in the United Kingdom the news of Astor's attainment of his fondest dream came as the crack of doom. They were his eldest son, Waldorf, and his wife, Nancy. His father was an old man; soon he would die and Waldorf then would become Lord Astor. But Waldorf Astor had not the slightest wish to be a peer; he was a hard-working, promising member of the House of Commons; to be condemned to the futility and stupidity of the Lords was intolerable. It was said that he begged his father not to accept the peerage. The old man was furious that a son of his should be so insensible to the high honour for which he had fought not merely for himself but for all his posterity. This was the unkindest cut of all and the quarrel between father and son became unbridgeable. It had been latent ever since Waldorf married Nancy and had been fanned by Nancy's sharp tongue. In 1914 there had been a flare-up when Nancy, it was reported, had referred slightingly to Astor's control of his "money-bags."

So far from giving up his baronage, Lord Astor pressed on for higher honours. After all, the Kingdom was littered with barons, the lowest rank of hereditary noble. He busied himself with a coat of arms: the falcon which had graced the shield of an Astorga in the Middle Ages graced his, too. His quest was satisfied on June 3, 1917, when the King's Birthday Honours listed him as one of the three new viscounts.

The *Daily News* was consumed with curiosity: "No statement has been made as to the nature of the services of which so distinguished and exceptional an honour is the recognition, but they must naturally have been considerable, for Astor only became a peer last year and his new honour excited the more surprise. He has contributed, I believe, generously to some of the war funds, but what rich man has not? If only to guard against ill-natured rumours, a clear statement on the subject seems desirable."

But the Ministry saw no need to give such an explanation and

anyway it seemed graceless to question honours handed out at such a glum hour in the nation's history. Whether Astor was a commoner or a duke mattered little to Englishmen in the trenches or Englishwomen watching the casualty lists. Nevertheless there was a discussion in the House of Lords on the granting of honours, with the wish that the Government might be more discriminating.

Having attained his object all sublime, Lord Astor fastened the cloak of privacy more tightly about him. He had given up Cliveden years before to his eldest son; now he abandoned Hever Castle to his favourite son, John Jacob V, who had just married Lady Violet Mary, fourth daughter of the Earl of Minto. That marriage was to Lord Astor's taste. He wrote an ante-nuptial agreement which was the most splendid and generous in his family's history. If Lady Violet would marry his son within six months, she was to have $30,000 a year and on the day of her marriage $4,000,000 — all to be deducted from John Jacob V's estate.

The old man then bought himself two-story Western House at Brighton, threw up the inevitable high board fence around it, and locked himself in such seclusion that not even the borough surveyor could enter the grounds on duty bound. About the only people who saw him there were Lord and Lady Nevill. It was Lady Nevill who insisted early in 1918 that he call in a physician to check his rapid physical decline. He had a curious notion then to marry again, but nothing came of it.

A nurse detailed the Viscount's habits: "He was very reserved. But once the ice was broken he was most delightful. He was decidedly exclusive. He never said 'Good morning' to anybody but there was something attractive about him. He was interested in art, but not in sports. He could not play golf because he was short-sighted. He was deeply interested in history and languages, and was a man of wide interests and deep mental activity."

His main enjoyment was his palate. As a rule he dined alone in a magnificent Italian dining-room he had created at Western House, feasting on the masterpieces of the best Italian chef he could hire. Each morning before breakfast he ate quantities

of prawns and artichokes; he kept a menu book in which he listed for his chef meals for months ahead.

His grandson and namesake, William Waldorf II, a little fellow of ten or so, was the lonely Lord's main link to his family. Often Billy came down to Brighton to cheer up his grandfather; when the boy was up in London or Cliveden, he received fond letters. "I have spent a week with a barrel of oysters and a superb turkey to keep me pleasant company," Lord Astor wrote on his tinted, coroneted stationery. "The turkey made its appearance six times — hot, cold, mince and grilled bones." "No one," he added in a sentence admirable for its understatement, "has ever died of hunger in a house of mine." And to counteract the teetotal leanings of Billy's mother, he wrote: "I hope that you will continue to grow fatter and wish you had a glass of red wine as I had from the age of seven, and as all my children had regularly with excellent results. I am an enthusiastic enemy of 'Down Glasses,' at least so far as I am personally concerned. I should not have my excellent health today had not I used stimulants freely all my life. My other rule for long life is to kill my Doctor. It is usually the doctor who kills the patient."

In reply to a birthday card from Billy, he wrote, on April 2, 1918: "I drank Lord Rhondda's health in a pint of champagne, and followed by black coffee with a small glass of the original Benedictine. After this I looked through some favorite books and smoked two cigarettes. To prevent this making me thirsty I sipped a brandy and soda."

Although he never attended a session of the House of Lords except on the two occasions when he was made a baron and a viscount, Lord Astor followed closely the troubling growth of Socialistic ideas in the final years of the war. To Peabody, his American agent, in 1918 he wrote: "The new House of Commons, which will guide our fate for at least a couple of months, is likely to be a curious medley of Labor, Socialists and women." Fortunately he could not know that his own daughter-in-law, Nancy, would soon be among the women. "The next House, a year or two hence, is likely to be much more revolutionary. For the moment we are trying to return to normal conditions and to shake off restrictions the war made necessary, and which

in better days would be intolerable. . . . For the coming year, or longer, I think it useless to attempt any development of the estate in New York. Useless to compete with strikes and the demands of labor."

Early in 1919 he was deeply concerned with one result of the war, " the advance of the Socialistic wave. Let us hope that it will spend its force in due time." He also advised selling New York property because " real estate taxes are bound to go higher and higher. There is no other way out for New York."

In England things were no better. Lloyd George, with whom his son Waldorf had worked closely, was " an extreme radical," feared because " the hen coops were always ready to be robbed by him."

For years he had been hedging against the spread of " Socialist " principles in taxation — the first Astor to be so perturbed. In 1911 ownership of the Waldorf Hotel and the Astor Court Building was transferred in trust to Waldorf. In 1915 he transferred his Wall Street holding to John Jacob V, in trust. In 1919 the Astor Hotel, valued at $4,000,000, the $1,000,000 Astor Theatre, the $1,500,000 apartments on upper Broadway, and other realty were turned over in trust to his two sons. On August 15, 1919 all his remaining property in New York was conveyed in equal shares to Waldorf and John Jacob V, a stratagem to thwart any inheritance tax.

The impact of the World War shattered tax systems based primarily on customs and excise. The income tax, whose very threat under Grover Cleveland had been one inducement to Astor's flight, had long existed in England as a flat impost without gradations. Lord Brougham years before had rejected a graduated tax as a " gross and revolting absurdity." By 1907 the levellers had succeeded in imposing a supertax on high incomes; and it was too late for Astor to flee again. By 1919 England was consuming nearly half of Astor's income, and the American government the other half. It was a painful example of what could happen to a man who derived his income from one country and spent it in another. The Astors curtailed their lavish way of life. Cliveden was actually offered for rent at $750 a week; orders were sent to New York to sell, sell, sell.

Portions of the patrimony went on the auction block to keep the English House from destitution's door.

A doom darker than any he had read in books hung over the fortune of Lord Astor in 1919. Immersed in his library and his speculations, he brooded over past ages when knighthood was in flower, when authority was unchallenged, God was in His heaven, and the King ruled. How different from the crumbling present!

Death claimed him on October 18, 1919, at the age of seventy-one, after a hearty meal of roast mutton, macaroni, and a bucket of Beaune. The funeral was held in St. George's Church in Hanover Square, but there were few to give public recognition to his passing, and none to mourn outside his family and servants. The ashes were placed in a private chapel at Cliveden — the first Astor to find a final resting-place on foreign soil.

So passed this quixotic man — the first and only prodigal Astor. His will was brief because he had already distributed his estate among his sons. In his lifetime he had spent perhaps as much as twenty-five million dollars on lavish residences at Cliveden, Hever Castle, Carlton House Terrace, and Sorrento. He had reversed the parsimony for which his family was noted by a princely way of living and by open-handed gifts. Even worse, he had imperilled his Estate by moving to England, where he and his heirs were trapped by double taxation. A life-long worshipper of the aristocratic virtues bound up in land-ownership, he was to divorce, all unwittingly, the English House of Astor from its sure foundation on the rocks of Manhattan. When the bulk of their New York realty was sold, his heirs would find themselves as subject to the vagaries of stocks and bonds as any other capitalist family. Shadows of that transition darkened his final years, but it was then too late to fend off Socialistic perils.

The first Lord Astor might rank in history as the most anti-democratic man ever nourished in America. Reared in the rigid aristocratic dogma by John Jacob the Proud, armed with a brittle belief in the prerogatives and privileges of wealth, he had found his native land intolerable. Thanks to the good fortune of the World War, he finally wrung from the King his life's

ambition, only to find a hereditary badge of nobility turning to ashes, what with a successor who despised the title and an era that threatened to make short shrift of his ideals.

Morbidly sensitive to every passing paragraph, he was also one of the most maladroit men who ever lived. This modern knight used a chequebook for a sword, and was surprised and wounded that men should feel contempt both for his Congressional bid in New York and his bid for the House of Lords in London. He found it necessary to build high fences around Cliveden, Hever Castle, Western House, and himself, to die lonely and friendless, a vain, contentious, irascible eccentric — the most abject victim that the dead hand of the Founder had yet touched.

CHAPTER *iii*

Democratic Aristocrat

Both in England and in America the fifth generation of the saturnine House of Astor produced scions apparently made in the image of their fellow men. For the first time in the family's history the new heads of the senior and junior branches had something of the common touch. Vincent Astor proclaimed that he was " just a regular American "; his cousin Waldorf was the first of his line to combine an ingratiating personality with a totally un-Astorian concern for the world about him.

The second Viscount Astor was every inch a commoner, his dislike for the House of Lords matched only by his contempt. Physically he was much like his father, and bore the family trait of nervous shyness; but his eyes, large and brown, were his mother's, and he was friendly. Dark curly hair grew low on a broad forehead. Like his father's, his mind was strong and curious, but his interests were in his own times, not in the Italian Renaissance or in occult speculations about the Prince of Wisdom and Balkameh. One was a nineteenth-century old-school Tory; the other the archetype of the twentieth-century Tory democrat, heedful of social welfare, the need for better schools and better-nourished children. He was the first of the Astors to denounce a source of his own income — the slums.

In one thing father and son agreed, that the wealth each had inherited was his. Both were staunch opponents of Socialism. The father held Socialism to be the spirit of discontent that railed against God, the State, and wealth; the Czar had been right in sending such railers to Siberia, and America could well devote Alaska to the same end.

His son held that Socialism expressed the all too human envy, jealousy, and greed of the masses compounded with their sufferings; this could be dissolved by better housing, nursery schools, better nutrition, a humane attention to the needs of the lower classes within the framework of the existing system.

Such aims he had furthered as member for Plymouth in the House of Commons; but on his father's death he automatically became Lord Astor and was therefore about to forfeit not only his seat in the lower House but the foundation, he believed, for a promising career. His first public act after his father's funeral was to startle all England by attempting to fling from him the ermine robes of a peer of the realm. Lords and colonels were shocked to their boots by his affront to the King, " who gave the family the honour which this man would now comtemptibly give back." They agreed that the father's rude and pushing American manner in buying the title was equalled only by the son's ingratitude and irreverence in rejecting it.

Waldorf got his friend and retainer James H. Thomas, secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen, to introduce a bill " to empower His Majesty to accept the surrender of any peerage." The House of Commons voted it down, 169 to 56. The King might abdicate, but Astor a Viscount would remain to his dying day! Waldorf may well have cursed primogeniture, for his brother, Major John Jacob V, was the very figure of a lord, a man cut more to his father's style, and not distracted by the strange blend of Tory Socialism which afflicted Waldorf. Yet it was Waldorf who had to ascend the dreary chamber where a handful of ghost-like men played, in an oppressive silence, at being the mighty lords of mediæval times. There he promptly became a gadfly with a perennial bill calculated to offend the Lords down to their deepest prejudices — a bill permitting peeresses in their own right (not by right of marriage) to sit in the hoary House. Session after session he reintroduced his bill, and once saw it defeated by only 80 to 78. The fact that 150 peers actually bothered to vote indicated how deeply that House of Absentees was shaken.

This Lord who dearly wanted to be a commoner was born in New York City in 1879, was sent to Eton even before his father

had abandoned America, and distinguished himself at New College, Oxford, in French, journalism, and debating, in rowing, cricket, sabres, steeplechase, and polo. As captain of the 1902 Oxford polo team on which Devereux Milburn played, he was satisfied to hang up a 14 to 0 score against Cambridge. But his physique was unequal to strenuous sport, and he strained his heart.

After taking his degree he followed the pattern of high-spirited young English gentlemen. Barred from vigorous exertion, he became a breeder of racing horses, earned thousands of pounds in the races with them, and became famous in turf circles as five times runner-up but never the winner of the Derby until 1936. He kept a forest, Glendoe, in Scotland for pheasants and hunting.

Before the Coronation of Edward VII, his father invited the English-born Crown Princess Marie of Rumania and her husband to Cliveden. There the future Queen Marie met Waldorf and his sister, Pauline — "the starting point of a very dear friendship which has meant much in my life." Waldorf invited the Rumanians and their suite to Cliveden to await the Coronation; weeks, said Marie, of "*absolute* happiness," the enchantment of free and easy English life in superb surroundings.

The future Queen saw little of the elder Astor, absorbed, she said, in his own affairs, grim and unbending, with tastes and habits his children could not share. Waldorf she described as tall, slender, shy, speaking in a low-pitched voice; his sister charming in face, with dark, waving hair and large brown eyes with a startled look.

Waldorf's younger sister, Gwendolyn, died that fall. He and Pauline went to Sinaia, he to recover from an operation, she to overcome her loneliness. To Marie, starved for companionship in her adopted land, their visit was balm, and was often to be repeated.

Back in England, Waldorf met Nancy Langhorne Shaw, a young American divorcée who had been introduced at court by Mrs. Choate, wife of the Ambassador, and taken under the wing of Mrs. John Jacob Astor IV. She had a small hunting lodge up in the fox country, was vivacious, and had been re-

portedly engaged to Lord Revelstoke. Nancy was one of the Famous Five Virginians, all daughters of Chiswell Dabney Langhorne, who had made a fortune building the Chesapeake & Ohio across the mountains in Kentucky.

Ward McAllister, *the* Mrs. Astor's squire, had sighted Irene Langhorne at a Richmond ball, and invited her to New York to lead the Patriarchs' grand march in 1893. McAllister's good eye and his affection for old Virginia were the Langhorne girls' fortune, leading them all eventually to brilliant marriages and one to the title of Viscountess. In 1895 Irene was married to Charles Dana Gibson, with her younger sister Nancy a bridesmaid. Irene was thenceforth immortalized as the Gibson Girl, while Nancy in 1897 became the belle of Newport. Medium blonde with fine eyes, slender figure, erect and graceful, she had the saucy manner that betokened the ending of the Victorian age of womanly demureness. That fall she was married at Mirador, the family home in Albemarle County, to Robert Gould Shaw II, son of the famous abolitionist who died leading a Negro regiment on Fort Wagner, South Carolina, and was "buried with his niggers."

In Boston Bob and Nancy were shining lights in the Myopia chase and the Country Club and their home at Pride's Crossing became a centre of the horsy set. Bob had won the Astor gold cup in 1895, had played on the Harvard polo team in 1890, and kept a large stable.

But after a while it turned out to be not such good clean sport as Nancy had imagined. She took her boy south to Mirador and got a divorce on statutory grounds in 1903. Bob immediately married Mrs. Converse, an English actress, much to the disgust of his family, who were said to have made a settlement with Nancy. She was off to England. Remarked *Town Topics:* "Mrs. Shaw is just the kind of woman to make a success in English Society. She has lots of esprit and without perhaps being a particularly pretty woman, she is exceedingly attractive in appearance. She is svelte, chic and petite, with a girlish grace which is very fetching and like her sister is fascinating in manner and conversation."

Some might have said the romance of Nancy and Waldorf

was made in the stars. They were both born on May 19, 1879; many remarked a striking resemblance between them; both loved horses and hunting.

Waldorf's father snorted at such a marriage — exactly the kind his son would be making, to an American divorcée rather than to an English noblewoman. Nevertheless the wedding was held, after nervous juggling of dates, for many Church of England rectors were firm about not marrying divorced persons. Neither William Waldorf nor Chiswell Langhorne were at All Souls Church on May 3, 1906, both being indisposed with the gout, but three of Nancy's sisters, Ambassador and Mrs. Whitelaw Reid, and the Duchess of Roxburghe were there. The elder Astor held a grand reception in his Gothic hall on the Embankment, and a honeymoon followed at Ford Manor in Surrey, lent by Waldorf's sister, Pauline, Mrs. Spender-Clay. For a wedding present the elder Astor handed over Cliveden to his son and a $75,000 tiara containing the famous Sancy diamond to his daughter-in-law. Her husband gave her a necklace with three rows of superb pearls.

They continued their honeymoon in Maine at the Gibsons' estate and then at Mirador, where a coloured servitor remarked: "Lawdy, Miss Nannie, why, you jest out-married y'self." That feeling did not oppress Nancy, who quipped to her husband: "Don't be snooty, Waldorf; my ancestors were skinnin' niggers when yours were skinnin' skunks."

It pleased some peeresses to snub this upstart American who had married so many barely-English millions, but Edward VII took a fancy to her, invited himself to her house, and then invited the cream of English society to attend. Her rivals tried to break up a tête-à-tête with the King by asking them to play bridge. "But I wouldn't know a king from a knave," she protested, while Edward laughed uproariously. It was a flare of the famed Nancy Astor wit, a mixture of impertinence, gaiety, and good timing, and if the King enjoyed it, who were others to object?

With superb Cliveden as a country background for entertainment, the Waldorf Astors selected the finest establishment on

LORD WALDORF ASTOR (1879-)

the second Viscount, son of William Waldorf Astor, with LADY ASTOR *(née Nancy Langhorne of Virginia), her son by a previous marriage, and the family. Left to right: R. G. Shaw; Hon. Phyllis Astor; Hon. Michael Astor; Hon. W. W. Astor; Lady Astor, M.P.; Lord Astor; Hon. John Jacob Astor VII; and Hon. David Astor*

PHOTO, KEYSTONE

St. James's Square for their town house. Of that centre of the fashionables it had been rhymed:

> She shall have all that's fine and fair,
> And ride in a coach to take the air,
> And have a house in St. James's Square.

The site was originally owned by Nicholas Barebone, son of the great Praise-God who built the first house for the Earl of Kent in 1676. The Kents had held on until the 1880's. All around the square dwelt dukes, earls, and viscounts.

The Cliveden that suited the Duke of Westminster was good enough for the elder Astor, but not for Americanized Nancy. Richard Harding Davis, invited there in the early days of younger Astor tenancy, found workmen overcoming all too English deficiencies in plumbing. "If dukes," remarked Davis, "lived no more comfortably than those who owned Cliveden I am glad I was not a duke."

Cliveden became the rendezvous for the smart set among the nobility and the Anglo-American crowd. Mrs. Vanderbilt, the Marquess Palavacini, and the Princess of Pless motored out for lunch and found there the Duke and Duchess of Connaught. On another occasion the Princess of Pless found "this heavenly place" full of people, with the Grand Duke Michael and Winston Churchill leading off. The house, the cooking, the surroundings were perfect, the Astors admirable hosts, Waldorf friendly and Nancy chatty, with "a cynical mind and a sentimental heart." On a week-end early in 1914 they were entertaining the Asquiths, Balfour, the Winston Churchills, Lord and Lady Charles Beresford, Lord Roberts, Sir Horace Plunkett, J. L. Garvin of the *Observer*, Philip Kerr of the *Round Table*, Ernest Shackleton — mixing men of various parties and temperaments.

Armed with suitable town and country houses, with a serious interest in politics, and with a wife socially ambitious, young Waldorf set out in quest of a Parliamentary seat. Not for him were those bucolic constituencies where gouty old M.P.'s fa-

voured the constituency with one hoarse speech in a campaign. He was a sporting young man and would like to look a canvass in the eye. Residence being no requirement in England, Unionist headquarters obligingly showed its wares, seats here and there, among them one at Plymouth, a dock workers' town in need of a good imperialist who believed in the Navy and could talk the Socialists down. Suitable financial arrangements having been made for the care of the Unionist agent and party expenses, Waldorf, a "carpetbagger," journeyed to Plymouth to look over prospects and get local endorsement. Knowledge of his millions had preceded him and local Conservatives were flattered to know that campaign expenditures would be forthcoming.

There was nothing further to do but wait for a general election — a matter of a few years, for the Liberals were shielded behind a sizable majority. Then the Lords in 1909 rejected Lloyd George's "Socialistic" taxes aimed at land values, and the Liberals "went to the country."

That issue, which went straight to the Astorian core, as well as the pocketbooks of most lords, was hardly suitable for a dockyard constituency, so Astor offered to wager $2,500 that a protective tariff would not increase the workers' food budget. He was defeated by a 500-vote margin out of 15,000; nevertheless he was buoyed by the rise in the Tory vote.

Fortunately, he did not have to wait five years for another election. The Liberals late in 1909 went to the country again on the straight issue of clipping the Lords' power of veto. Although later he was to detest the upper House, young Astor succeeded in winning his seat on its defence, a feat all the more remarkable as the Liberals won a smashing national victory.

So it was that this "liberal Conservative" set his foot in Commons in 1910 on the issue of defending the Lords, whom he detested. It was symbolic of a life to be spent in a seeming contradiction, of advancing liberal measures through Conservative channels, and reaching the ultimate paradox of defending certain of the ambitions of the most notorious illiberal of modern times — Adolf Hitler.

His first espousal of a social measure may have followed from

his sister Gwendolyn's death of tuberculosis. He ranged himself alongside Lloyd George in support of tuberculosis sanitariums in the national insurance bill and was in return named chairman of a committee to study the problem. Later he attacked bad milk: that served in the House restaurant, a "rare and fruity vintage," contained 72,000,000 bacteria per c.c. But he opposed a ban on tubercular milk, urging that it be boiled, all milk graded, and sellers licensed.

He opposed Irish Home Rule because an Irish parliament might harm English farmers; always he had a good argument in what Liberals called a bad cause, but his colleagues began to respect his learned words. A circle of young M.P.'s started the *Round Table,* an organ that groped toward what later came to be known as Tory democracy. Prominent among them was young Philip Kerr, who became Lord Lothian. They met at 4 St. James's Square for their weekly "motes," and as spring wore on, they week-ended at Cliveden — the first "Cliveden set." While young Astor and Kerr guided the discussions of what was best for Britain and the Empire, Nancy enlivened otherwise dullish sessions. Soon dukes and commoners, employers and union officials, imperialists and free-traders, educators, scholars, and bright young Socialists were adorning the Astor town and country houses, Nancy boasting: "There is only one gift that I am sure I have, and this is for getting people of all sorts and conditions together, mixing them up and making them talk."

The Round Tablers and the Astors welcomed everyone except crusty old Tories who believed the Empire to be God-ordained and beyond mortal discussion. Labour leaders were amazed to find warm hearts beating under upper-crust breasts. Such a thing had not been suspected in many Independent Labour Party circles. After all, there were bonds that could exist between intelligent young Tories and intelligent young Labourites; all that the charming host and hostess of 4 St. James's Square and Cliveden expected in return, they thought, were interesting conversation and a spirit of cameraderie.

Not only his membership in the House, his *Round Table,* and his hospitality reinforced Astorian ambitions, but also the pos-

session of the soundest, most powerful Conservative Sunday newspaper in England, the *Observer* (the elder Astor had disposed of the *Pall Mall Gazette*). J. L. Garvin thundered in Astor's paper for a protective tariff, for the privileges of the House of Lords, and turned savagely on the Irish. He who once had urged the Irishman "to blaze at the whites of his enemies' eyes" now was spokesman for Tory Die-Hards in Ulster preparing rebellion against the United Kingdom.

Was this also young Astor's view? The question was ungracious. He did not dictate that his Labour guests accept his views at Cliveden; certainly he did not dictate that his editor accept his own views, either. On the other hand it seemed that Garvin expressed more emphatically many opinions which could be traced in Astor's speeches in Parliament. Even so it was hard to reconcile Garvin, who, according to Hamilton Fyfe, did "his best to counteract the effect of the Christian Sunday by preaching the worship of brute force," with the Christian Science principles which had seized Waldorf and Nancy. In 1914 she was a semi-invalid, consumed, she confessed later, by selfishness and illness. Doctors did no good. She tried Christian Science and was overjoyed to find that God made neither sin nor sickness; that both materialism and evil were unreal. "I saw that this new light would help me to understand all human problems." Perhaps Philip Kerr's conversion to Christian Science helped enlighten Nancy. Certain it was that the enlightenment spread to Waldorf, who found in it a remedy for suffering humanity. Their faith shed a new humanism over the Astors; they began to search their own hearts for good and to attribute the world's woes to man's selfishness, greed, and envy.

Selfishness, greed, and envy, concentrated on a colossal scale in the Kaiser and his Junkers, broke into the interesting world of Waldorf and Nancy in 1914 and threatened to turn it topsy-turvy. While aging William Waldorf scattered American dollars among British war charities, and John Jacob V marched off for Belgium to join the thin line of "Little Contemptibles," Waldorf enlisted for duties on the home front. Chief among these was to man the all-important social front facing America.

His brother could leave his blood soaking into Belgian mud; Waldorf would concentrate on the friendship of the United States, worth entire armies. They had, in truth, been serving on that front for years. As Lawrence Abbott observed: "The warmth of their affection for the United States of America did not in the slightest degree lessen their British patriotism." Accompanied by Lord Grey, the Foreign Minister, Waldorf and Nancy called at American Committee Headquarters and placed Cliveden at the disposal of stranded Americans — diplomats, journalists, any person who could influence American opinion. Americans "of position" were eternally welcome there or at the Astors' town house. Frederick Palmer later wrote of this phase of warfare: "Propaganda was as promising a method as Red Cross and canteen work of doing one's bit when of the wrong sex or too old — though not always too old — to be at the front. The American wives of Englishmen who had already given their proof that 'blood is thicker than water,' led by Lady Astor, formed a battalion of solicitude lest Americans in London become homesick." For years they and Cliveden had been as much a sight for visiting Americans of rank as Niagara or the Woolworth Building at home. Nancy knew "everybody of importance" across the sea; and for them a trip to England was unfinished until Nancy and her new setting had been inspected. Later the Astors retired to Devon, "where the children could get moorland air and we could work in Plymouth most of the day." Writing Americaward, Nancy said: "This dreadful war is almost unbelievable, but these Germans must be licked once and for all now." She recounted soldiers' stories of Belgian women "with both hands cut off," of beastly Germans who advanced with Belgian women and children as living shields.

The Astors combined war work with their new enthusiasm — temperance. Cottages instead of tents were offered war wounded who would take the pledge, and Waldorf was placed on the Central Board of (Liquor) Control, where he associated with another high-minded Tory, Neville Chamberlain.

Most famous of all the Astors' war aid was the dedication of their tennis-court building at Cliveden to a hospital for Cana-

dian soldiers. Named the Duchess of Connaught's Canadian Red Cross Hospital, it was manned by ten medical officers, twenty nurses, and more orderlies, all at Astorian expense. Sir William Osler came out every Monday morning to supervise the good work. "The demands on him never stop," wrote Lady Osler. "At Cliveden if he doesn't go every Monday they are dreadfully annoyed and Nancy telephones to know why — and says her children are weeping for him."

Nancy passed among her heroes, distributing solace and banter. She was disturbed to find some of her wounded guests were Socialists and upbraided them for being "naughty." One fellow retorted: "We only want you to get off our backs." She became quite friendly and used to come and argue with "my Socialists."

Eventually there was a cemetery at Cliveden as well, hedged about with trees and flowering shrubs, and tableted with tributes to the Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand dead.

In the early part of the war Astor, barred by a weak heart from active duty, was inspector of quartermaster services in charge of dispatches, worked in Parliament, was a governor of Guy's Hospital in London, and of the Peabody Trust founded by the British-American merchant who flourished in the Founder's time, and served on government committees for tuberculosis and medical research.

Such activities fell somewhat short of breathless interest. The war really opened for Waldorf when Lloyd George shifted from the Munitions Ministry to No. 10 Downing Street. Astor moved into the new Prime Minister's residence as a secretary, hustle-bustled the erection of huts in the garden, installed himself in two of Mrs. Lloyd George's rooms, and served as contact man between the dynamic Premier, the War Committee, and the departments, his friend Philip Kerr also advancing to a similar rank in the official family. His kindliness and tact combined with American efficiency sheared through the red tape so detested by Lloyd George and cemented a friendship that was to be of great value in later years in helping the Astors hold Plymouth for the Conservatives.

The Astors could claim no little credit on both sides of the

Atlantic for America's entry into the war; Vincent had been as energetic in New York as Cousin Waldorf in London in working toward that goal. Extension of the war that was to uproot Kaiserism for Hitlerism evoked Waldorf's pæan: "The future peaceful government of the world and the development of democracy make it essential that the United States should share the burdens of the Allies. I rejoice that the English-speaking people whose ideals are identical, are at last together in the great fight for liberty and right."

In mid-1918 he advanced to the post of Parliamentary Secretary to the Food Ministry. In that he was interviewed while at work, late at night, in the chilled ministry offices, enthusiastic over employer-union co-operation. He had got the two sides together in week-ends at his mansion on the Hoe in Plymouth, where he had worked to allay mistrust. The unions, with no share in the control of industry, felt that employers were profiteering and feared any agreement might trap them into unemployment. Many employers did not want to recognize the unions or even to join the employers' federation. Indicative of the sweep of the New Idea, war-pressed, through his mind was his declaration that "autocracy in industrialism is passing out just as is autocracy in kingship." Firms not run on democratic lines, he felt, would be left behind because men would flock to factories where the New Idea prevailed.

Nancy busied herself in the war years with childbearing. Francis David Langhorne was born in 1915, Michael in 1916, and John Jacob VII in 1918. When the Armistice was declared, her firstborn by Astor, William Waldorf II, was eleven, and Nancy Phyllis Louise nine.

With the Armistice came new issues flooding around Parliament — the terms of peace, the League of Nations, Reconstruction, housing — problems into which Astor threw himself enthusiastically while wrestling with such vexations as the American meat trust's grip on English prices.

Then his father died — and Waldorf stared blankly at the end of his Parliamentary career. For now he was, willy-nilly, Lord Astor and automatically out of Commons. He toyed with the idea of de-lording himself and found that impossible. Lord

Astor he had become and Lord Astor he would remain to his dying day.

Remarkable Nancy Langhorne Astor, one-time belle of Richmond and Newport, turned disaster into dazzling opportunity by deciding that she would be the first woman to break into Commons at the very time when her husband was taking his unwanted seat in the Lords. She would become his political widow from Plymouth, and more — she would become England's premiere political entertainer and World Feminist No. 1. She won the seat for which she stood by a handsome margin.

The press on both sides of the Atlantic cheered lustily the newsworthy Lady's epochal victory in crashing the gates of Parliament and cited America's share in her personal triumph. Suffrage leaders of all countries showered their congratulations on the woman who had shown no marked interest in the early suffragists' fight. It was a brave new world, England hummed with plans for Reconstruction (spelled invariably with a capital "R"), woman suffrage had been won on both sides of the Atlantic, the League of Nations was aborning, a new era was dawning over the earth's blood-drenched children. Lady Astor's triumph rang around the world as a token of these times.

But Countess Markiewicz, the first woman elected to Parliament (refusing, however, as a Sinn Feiner to take her seat), took a potshot at her colleague: "I consider it scandalous that the women electors of Great Britain never before have returned one of their own sex to Parliament. When they do finally, she is altogether of the wrong type. Lady Astor not only is a foreigner and a thoroughly unrepresentative woman but she is of the aristocracy, the Upper Ten, out of touch completely with the problems and difficulties confronting the average woman. She is a carpet-bagger."

Nancy's maiden speech dealt with her favourite enemy, Rum; soon after, she was bolting party lines to support a Labour bill to reduce the voting age of women from thirty to twenty-one and then to extend the suffrage to Indian women. Those early months in Commons she later described as "hell." She complained that her colleagues snubbed her, one of them, years

later, telling her that "when you took your seat I endured the same kind of embarrassment as I would if a lady invaded my bathroom."

"If I were as ugly as you," retorted ever-ready Nancy, "I should have no fear of any lady invading my bathroom."

She became Commons' foremost heckler. Even the staid *Morning Post* complained that in one sitting she had interrupted fifteen speeches, including her own. "When she did not directly interrupt to explain, comment, deny, expostulate, she interjected. She popped up excitedly. She subsided suddenly. She opened her mouth. She shut her mouth. She turned to this side and to that. She shrugged her shoulders. She said 'tchk, tchk.' She tapped an irritated toe tattoo."

Even her best friends felt embarrassed by the oft-times shrill spectacle in Commons, the uncouth altercations with Labourites from South Wales and Clydeside, the witless, heartless sallies, the broad jokes. But to Lady Astor it was all great fun: she was head mistress in a nursery school for politicians, and even the victims enjoyed the rows. The American press reported the doings of this Virginia-born M.P., this first of women Parliamentarians, this outstanding champion of women's rights, temperance, peace, the League of Nations, international goodwill, and close Anglo-American co-operation. The stage was set for a triumphal re-entry into her native land, when the League of Women Voters, meeting in national convention in Baltimore in 1922, provided the cue.

Clad in a black caracul coat with wide chinchilla collar and with five rings on her fingers, Nancy arrived in New York. Her sister, Mrs. Charles Dana Gibson, was one of the throng that greeted her at shipside. "You look like a lot of white trash," Nancy called out gaily. "I still talk like a nigger." The old feud between the two branches of the Astor family was healed when Vincent escorted her to the platform of Town Hall, where she received a stormy ovation — the symbol of Womanhood Enfranchised, Emancipated, Forward-Looking, and Determined Upon a Better World.

She faced New York reporters on her feet for two hours while she sparkled comments on every question of international and

American domestic affairs, from the Genoa conference to Mayor Hylan's speeches, touching lightly and to the reporters' delight upon bobbed hair, cosmetics, prohibition, the bonus, spiritualism, divorce, and the rewriting of American history.

The *New York Times* grew lyrical — " the best type of American womanhood, charming, gay, unaffected and unspoiled . . . not only wins all hearts but persuades all judgments . . . messenger of good cheer . . . what an American girl can do and become when given great opportunities."

Nancy swept on to Baltimore for the Women Voters' convention, back to New York for an Associated Press annual luncheon, then to Washington, and finally to her native Virginia. At Baltimore she admitted that she had broken no London windows for suffrage, but thanked those women who had. She was " too busy populating the world " at the time, but " many of my good friends went to prison."

In Richmond she said she loved Virginia better than England, that she was at heart an " unreconstructed Rebel." At a community party at her childhood home of Mirador a Negro servant said contentedly: " Well, de worl' is callin' my Miss Nancy Lady Astor now, but I knew her when she wa'n't no lady."

Given a grand send-off at New York, the Astors reported on their triumph to the English-Speaking Union in London. Suggestions were made in America that one or both of the Astors would make the best British Ambassador Washington had seen since Lord Bryce.

Undoubtedly at that moment in history this Virginia-born girl was the World's Woman No. 1. In her were concentrated the hopes of millions; she was the middle-class symbol of the search for a better way, through peace, understanding, goodwill. Certainly if goodwill alone could solve problems, Lady Astor had the solution. But very soon in the swelling tide of post-war prosperity it began to seem that there were no basic problems after all; the dream of Reconstruction faded, the symbol of Nancy Astor lost its significance. Memories of the World War faded, Nancy applied herself to nursery schools for slum children and to baiting Socialists. The heroic tone of her American

speeches became dated and unfashionable. The Coolidges of America and Britain had no further use for dreams and hopes. Money was being made; middle-class women who had thrilled to her message busied themselves with smaller problems than war and peace or the dangers which lurked beneath their comfortable lives.

CHAPTER *iv*

Money is Power

Anxious though he was to reject the coronet, Waldorf Astor made no effort to reject his patrimony. As his wife said, Lord Astor did not seek to achieve social reform through philanthropy. He had not the slightest desire to be on his own, to give up Cliveden or 4 St. James's Square, to shine by his own merits without the refracting glory supplied by income from the Astor and Waldorf Hotels and his half of his father's estate. For it was, after all, money that made the mare go round, that lifted Nancy to pre-eminence as the most noted woman in the world. Stripped of his money, My Lord Astor and his Lady would have cut a sorry figure in London's West End; Mayfair would not have recognized them; the American press, if it had noted the return of the native at all, would have tucked their arrival into a squib on page 27.

The final trust fund which old Lord Astor had set up, in the family tradition, for his sons, was assessed at $50,000,000; all the New York property — real estate and stocks and bonds — which he had left was valued at $80,000,000. When the English property was thrown in, the senior branch of the House of Astor had easily more than $100,000,000.

That was not a penny more than John Jacob III had turned over to his son in 1890. In thirty years the Astor Estate had not increased in value. That astounding fact refuted those dire predictions of the early 1900's that the estate must by 1920 be worth $1,000,000,000.

The obvious explanation for this standstill was that the first

Lord Astor had been the most extravagant of his line, reversing the sober — almost sombre — policy of William Backhouse and John Jacob III. William Waldorf had had to buy his lordship — an expensive operation, which meant acquiring Cliveden, a house on Carlton House Terrace, Hever Castle, the exquisitely costly estate office on the Embankment, and the disbursement of a small fortune in glittering Imperial philanthropies.

William Waldorf was consumed by a passion for exhibiting his name — and was willing to pay. He poured millions into the Waldorf and the Astor Hotels, but when he died the Waldorf was second-rate, dreaming mustily among its once magnificent memories. Another great gourmet, the fourth Earl of Bristol, had achieved immortality almost without cost, for it was said that no fewer than 6,534 Hotels Bristol existed in the world, the originals named in honour of his having stopped at them.

During William Waldorf's regency the Astor Estate had suffered from a lack of the loving care his father and grandfather had bestowed. The Founder held it not beneath his dignity to wring rentals from a delinquent widow; William Backhouse was said to know every pane of glass in his tenements; the third John Jacob sat in daily attendance upon business needs. But the first Lord Astor delegated authority to his manager three thousand miles away. The early Astors knew their estate from the bottom up, the later from the top down.

Most important of all harmful factors was Manhattan's loss of its monopoly position. The Roeblings' mighty bridge to Brooklyn started the spilling of population into neighbouring boroughs; a little later tenants hitherto confined to Manhattan's East Side could follow the elevated into the Bronx. The World War stopped immigration and the new American quota policy permanently dried up the stream that would have filled Astor tenements as former tenants spread into the suburbs.

And then taxes had mounted alarmingly. In the Founder's day the city provided no fire protection, little water, and only sketchy police guard. In the second Astor's reign came Croton water and sewers. At the turn of the century municipal services began to mount faster than rental income: tenement-house reform was costly. To cap the climax, the World War brought

higher taxes on incomes and, worst of all, inheritance taxes.

Against all this the first Lord Astor had hedged as well as legal advice permitted. When he died, his estate was found to include only Western House in Brighton and a personal trust fund of $6,000,000. For twenty years following his death courts were to ponder the interesting question: Had Lord Astor dispersed his estate among his sons in expectation of death? For on that fine point rested the incidence of tax claims for $15,000,000.

Had the British government been privy to William Waldorf's thoughts in 1916 when he set up two trust funds disposing of his stocks and bonds, it might not have been so anxious to give him his coronet and later to make him a Viscount. The facts came out in the trial of the American government's claim to nearly $5,000,000 inheritance tax on the two 1916 trusts amounting to some $25,000,000. The Bureau of Internal Revenue contended that the terms of the trust were plain: that the first Lord Astor was to continue to enjoy the income of the trust funds until his death, that he reserved the right to change the beneficiaries named and also held absolute power over both the property and its income. If this was true, the trust was merely a device to evade inheritance taxes.

Norman H. Davis, counsel for the Astor Estate, did not agree. Astor had set up the trust funds in America for fear he might be "forced" by the British government to exchange his excellent American securities "for War Bonds as part of a plan to provide the [British] Government with funds for the purchases of war supplies in the United States." His new-found British patriotism, it was evident, did not extend so far as to place British war bonds on a par with private American stocks and bonds.

The American government's inheritance levy of $4,971,000 was upheld in 1926 by Judge Knox, but two years later the Circuit Court of Appeals in an opinion by Judge Martin T. Manton reversed Judge Knox. Admitting that the first Lord Astor had reserved the right to modify the trusts, Judge Manton decided that he could have done so only with the consent of the trustee, Farmers Loan & Trust. And so $5,000,000 was

saved to Major John Jacob V and to the four sons of the second Lord Astor (for Waldorf had been disinherited in the distribution of the Astorian stocks and bonds by his splenetic father).

The securities thus freed for Major Astor from the spectre of taxation included:

332	Bankers Trust
164	Central Union Trust
1,948	Delaware & Hudson
1,356	Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Coal
1,612	Farmers Loan & Trust
2,732	Illinois Central
860	Lackawanna Railroad
1,668	Morris & Essex Railroad
500	National Bank of Commerce
624	National City Bank
204	New York Life Insurance & Trust
3,024	Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne & Chicago
1,996	United New Jersey Railroad & Canal
2,300	Pullman Company
1,560	Rensselaer & Saratoga Railroad
500	Cleveland & Pittsburgh Railroad
4,000	Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad
72	Chemical National Bank

An equal sum was set aside for Waldorf's sons. Early in 1922 they received some $775,000 accumulated under these trusts, and were to continue to receive $25,000 a year each.

The 1919 trust which distributed the remainder of the first Lord Astor's real estate, valued at $50,000,000, between his two sons was even more suspect. The Bureau of Internal Revenue had assessed taxes of $11,250,000 against this trust, made so clearly, it was contended, in "contemplation of death," which had come in the same year.

Waldorf and John Jacob V canvassed the New York legal fraternity and decided to entrust the fate of their $11,000,000 to John W. Davis, candidate for the Presidency in 1924 on the Democratic ticket. Davis drew a picture of the first Lord Astor's

declining years, haunted by the nightmare of " Socialistic " taxation, fearful of a capital levy which might confiscate a good share of his wealth. When General Haig sent his famous " We are fighting with our backs to the wall " message, Astor was a man " in terror of expropriation by the British Government," John W. Davis told Federal Judge Caffey. The judge agreed, and held that the 1919 trusts were made in fear of income taxes and not in contemplation of death.

By 1933 the U.S. Circuit Court unanimously reversed Caffey and ordered William Waldorf's heirs to pay the inheritance tax with accumulated interest, by then $17,000,000. An appeal to the Supreme Court was refused in 1936.

In 1937 the case was again in the courts on the petition of Waldorf and Major John Jacob for a refund of the taxes paid, which with accumulated interest amounted to nearly $20,000,000. John W. Davis marshalled the Astor legal talent. " Lord Astor," he said, " was not a tax dodger. He was a tax payer in a big way. His whole purpose was to put his estate, personal and real, beyond the reach of the British Government." The American government maintained that Astor had been seriously ill of pneumonia in Nice early in 1919 and was " quite a wreck " when he returned to Brighton at the age of seventy-one to execute the trust deeds — clearly contemplating death. The issue was whether he was trying to evade British taxes or American. To prove its case, the Astor Estate bared letters that nothing but the recovery of $20,000,000 would have forced the proud family to reveal. For instance, the manager of the estate office in London testified that in 1919 Lord Astor had ordered him to Italy to get the family jewels out of that country without paying the heavy Italian export duties. Smuggling was the only word for this operation, and the manager proceeded warily. His daughter went with him as his secretary and wore the jewels out of Italy successfully.

Letters of Lord Astor to his favourite grandson were read to prove that the old gentleman was still as enamoured in 1919 with the delights of the stomach as ever, doctors deposed on his physical condition, and the menu he prepared for the day he died was introduced. It was even revealed that he had not

died, as reported in the press, of heart disease, but in reality of a ruptured blood vessel in the stomach. He suddenly burst in the midst of all his eating and drinking, according to his sons. While such items from the private life of a lord were hardly likely to edify descendants, they were considered worth the $20,000,000 at stake.

Details on income were revealed. In 1918 Lord Astor had drawn $1,320,000 from New York real estate on which the American government took $600,000 and the British $250,000. After his death Farmers Loan & Trust had paid $300,000 a year each to Waldorf and Major John Jacob in 1920, 1921, and 1922, and $500,000 to each in 1923. Gross rents had been $2,563,000 in 1920; $2,480,000 in 1921; $2,653,000 in 1922. The income tax had taken $427,000 from Waldorf in 1920 and $355,000 from the Major.

Judge Patterson weighed the evidence and declared the issue was simple: If the late Lord Astor had made the trust in contemplation of death at the age of seventy-one to enable his sons to dodge the inheritance tax, then the verdict must be for the government; if on the other hand the Viscount had been trying to avoid the possibility of a capital levy in England, the verdict should be to the Astor Estate. The jury held for the government. In 1938 the verdict was upheld upon appeal. Late in 1939 the Supreme Court was declining a rehearing of arguments, and it seemed certain that the Astors had lost $20,000,000 as well as some family secrets.

The actual tax situation that confronted Lord Astor's heirs in 1919 was worse than anything the old man had imagined. Both the American and the British governments were taxing the same income; it was reported that Waldorf and John Jacob were paying $1,134,000 to their native land in 1919 and $1,680,000 to the British. Their father's injunction to dispose of real estate because "there is no other way out" was followed to meet taxes that were said for a period to exceed income. The spirit of Henry George tasted sweet victory as the orders came from London to sell, sell, sell: rows of tenements along West 129th and West 130th Streets, along West Fifteenth, entire blocks along upper Broadway and down on notorious Avenue A,

parts of the old Cosine farm between West Forty-fourth and West Forty-fifth, 1,669 lots in the Bronx, the Netherland Hotel, the northern half of the old Astor House, the Exchange Court Building and other Wall Street property. By 1925 some $20,000,000 had been realized and the American government satisfied.

Also sacrificed in the post-war rush was the first Lord Astor's monument to his vanity, the estate office on the Embankment, which had reportedly cost him $1,500,000. Eventually it became the home of the British Society of Incorporated Accountants and Auditors, still a show place along the Thames although few now realize American dollars built it.

The British Astors were still important American landlords. Guest at the Astor Hotel, Lord Astor could remind his audience that "now that I come to think of it, as I own the hotel, I am not sure that I am not your host." The Astor was revivified to the tune of $500,000 and shops installed along Broadway to bring in $240,000 a year. While Times Square was not the quietest place in the world to get a good sleep, the Astor prospered by catering to New York's insatiable habit of lunching, dining, and banqueting in herds. As many as five thousand could be dined together; a modest nine-course ten-dollar banquet for fifteen hundred panned out at the rate of three dollars for the cost of the dinner and one dollar for Lord Astor and his lessee.

In addition the English Astors retained the Apthorp apartment house on Broadway at Seventy-eighth Street, assessed at $3,325,000, 23–27 Park Row (site of an old theatre the Founder had built), assessed at $775,000, valuable locations in the old Cosine farm assessed at $3,000,000, and stray bits of the old Astor Estate scattered about Manhattan and the Bronx — all the holdings amounting to nearly $20,000,000. In the 1930's they began shopping around again for Manhattan realty after the British government decided not to levy inheritance taxes against property held outside its borders. A $10,000,000 deal was put through by which Tiffany followed the march of fashion up Fifth Avenue from Thirty-seventh Street to Fifty-

seventh, and Pauline (Mrs. Spender-Clay) salted away $600,000 in an apartment at 3–5 East Eighty-fourth Street.

It was hardly true that the English Astors were permanently crippled by the exactions of governments on both sides of the Atlantic. Once the wretched business of two Treasuries taxing the same income had been straightened out, the Astors returned to normalcy. The $11,000,000 handed over to Washington had never, in a sense, been theirs; the $85,000,000 or so that remained was ample for their needs. Indeed, by 1922 Major J. J. Astor had enough loose cash to enter the tense struggle that had developed after Lord Northcliffe's death for control of the London *Times*. A generation before, it would have seemed blasphemous for the first Lord Astor to seek ownership of "the Thunderer," regarded by so many as the greatest newspaper in the world; but few outside the inner circle regarded his son's bid with more than curiosity. For Major Astor had proved himself an Englishman through and through by spilling his blood for the Empire. Educated like his brother at Eton and New College, Oxford, he had early preferred the military life, had joined the First Life Guards in 1906, and by 1911 was aide to the Viceroy of India, an honour that warmed the cockles of his father's heart. A town in Dardistan, Kashmir, and a river that joins the Indus in a deep pine-clad valley were named for Astor, who in his three-year stay proved his mettle as a tiger-shooter.

His arm broken in two places by a shell which drove fifteen pieces of metal into his body at the Battle of Ypres in the third month of the World War, Captain Astor was invalided to London. In 1916 he married Lady Violet Mary Elliot Nairne, twenty-seven, widow of an officer who had been killed in the same battle in which Astor was wounded. Lady Violet was the daughter of the fourth Earl of Minto, who had served as Governor General of Canada and Viceroy of India. The marriage had the hearty approval of John Jacob's father, then Baron Astor of Hever, who was anxious that his children should mingle their blood with that of the British nobility.

Almost at the close of the war Captain Astor was wounded again when an explosive shell at Cambrai broke his leg, which

had to be amputated. In honour of his distinguished war record he was commissioned a major, a title he bore proudly, in contrast to Waldorf, who dropped his desk-won title of the same rank.

Inspired by Waldorf's Parliamentary example, Major Astor shopped around in 1920 for a suitable constituency and was offered Dover, a safe seat not far from his own Hever Castle.

Unfortunately for Astor, a Die-Hard Tory, tired of the Coalition government which was subsidizing far-flung housing schemes in a "squander-mania," entered the polls against him with the support of Lord Rothermere's and Lord Northcliffe's papers as well as of Horatio Bottomley's *John Bull.* That meant a split in the Tory vote most distasteful to the Major, who, shy and nervous like all the Astors, found campaigning mental agony. He lost. "A mine has been exploded at the very foundations of the Coalition Government," the press commented. The alliance of Liberal Lloyd George and Conservative Bonar Law was nearing its end.

Astor retired to Hever Castle to lick his wounds and ponder other means of public service. His brother had been not only an M.P. but a newspaper-publisher. A seat in Commons was subject to the mood of the electorate, but not so with newspapers. They could be bought, and in 1922 the organ of the British ruling class itself was laid upon the auction block, awaiting the pleasure of some multimillionaire willing to foot its deficits.

The circulation of this paper, which in prestige held the position which the *Chicago Tribune* so proudly claimed, was negligible. Before Northcliffe took hold it sold some 40,000 copies; he cut the price from threepence to twopence, and circulation crawled to 50,000; he cut the price to one penny and it rose to 165,000 — a niggling figure compared to the *Daily Mail's* 2,000,000. When Lord Northcliffe died, something had to be thrown to the wolves to pay the estate tax, and what better than the stodgy, unprofitable old *Times*?

Northcliffe's will directed that John Walter, descendant of the founder of *The Times,* be offered first choice. But Walter had no millions to fling about.

MAJOR JOHN JACOB ASTOR V, M.P. (1886-)

second son of William Waldorf Astor, with his wife, LADY VIOLET ASTOR

PHOTO, ACME

Lord Rothermere, brother of Northcliffe, was eager to own so mighty a white elephant; Walter held an option to buy, but had no cash; the old colonels, the retired generals, the gouty admirals, and other members and retainers of the ruling class held bated breath for fear the ambitious, clever, unscrupulous Rothermere might sweep *The Times* into his grasp. To whom could they turn for a saviour — what man of wealth would ally himself with John Walter and rescue the Thunderer from a fate worse than death?

Major John Jacob Astor strode forward. He smarted from memories of the 1920 Parliamentary campaign in Dover, when Rothermere's papers had encompassed his defeat. It was intimated that Rothermere would spend up to $5,000,000 for the Northcliffe holdings; Astor countered by authorizing Walter to offer $5,000,000 or however much more was needed to foil the wily financier. The deal was made — for $7,000,000; a tremendous price for a paper of slight circulation, meagre advertising, and heavy deficit, but a tribute to its power among that choice circle of fewer than 200,000 within the British Empire who read *The Times* as they would their Bible.

To save the Thunderer from such a peril again, Astor and Walter formed a new corporation which set up *The Times* as an Imperial institution and provided that stockholders could sell freely to Walter or Astor, but that all other sales of stock must be approved by a board of trustees consisting of the Lord Chief Justice, the Warden of All Souls College, Oxford, the Governor of the Bank of England, the President of the Royal Society, and the President of the Institute of Chartered Accountants.

A sigh of relief ran through the Empire: Astor appeared in the role of public benefactor. For all his misadventure in the Dover election, Tories held him to be a safe and sound man, unlike his brother Waldorf, who was suspected of Socialistic leanings. Certainly he was no social reformer, but a staid man of business.

The new proprietor outlined his policy: "The function of a paper like the *Times* is not to enter into rivalry with the Government of the day or to usurp for the benefit of its readers a party's prerogative of formulating political programs. It will

lean as far as possible to the support of the Government of the day and especially so when the Government is the spokesman of the nation in international affairs. Be it Tory, Liberal or Labour, the Government in office will in so far as the *Times* is concerned, be entitled to all that rightfully belongs to the Government of Great Britain. At a period of scarcely restricted democratic rule, it is all important that this organ, at any rate, should be universally acknowledged to express the thoughts and feelings of the ordinary citizen of the country."

That assured the continuance of the venerable Thunderer as semi-official organ of the Administration, and its unequivocal organ in foreign affairs. As for Astor himself, not much interested in the minutiæ of Parliamentary politics, he concerned himself mainly with the business management of his great enterprise. Under his regime a new building was erected in Printing House Square, fine new presses installed, the deficit transformed into a tidy profit, the paper maintained in all its glory.

By 1922 the revolution in British journalism that Major Astor's father had started in 1894 by installing millionaire control of the *Pall Mall Gazette* was completed. All the great newspapers of Britain had been corralled by the press Lords — Beaverbrook, Rothermere, Burnham, Camrose, Kelmsley, and Illiffe. Control of British journalism had passed, in the words of Sir Willmott Lewis, Washington correspondent of *The Times*, to men "who are principally millionaires and not journalists." Bismarck had said that the peace of Europe could be maintained by hanging a dozen editors; J. A. Spender added that six proprietors and a score of writers formulate all important opinion in the London press.

Geoffrey Dawson, an associate in the early Astor-Lothian *Round Table*, one of the "ten most intelligent men in England," was installed as editor under Astor's injunction that his paper must maintain "irrefutable proof of independence and open-mindedness."

Under the influence of such sedative generalities and of *The Times*' aloofness from the more raucous conflicts of the day, those Jovian intellects enthroned in sanctums in Printing House Square determined in majestic detachment and in the finest

spirit of fair play what was best for the British people, for the Indians and all the inhabitants of the far-flung Empire.

Thus did Major John Jacob Astor, fifth in descent from the Founder, raise high the honour and prestige of the Astor name. His choleric father had installed the family in the House of Lords; he had installed it in the heart of the Empire's greatest newspaper. Both could be pardoned whatever pride they took in the disposition of their great wealth.

Soon after he bought *The Times,* Major Astor gained his wished-for seat in Commons. Running on a straight Conservative ticket in 1922, he overwhelmed his Die-Hard opponent; unopposed in the 1923 general election, he went nonchalantly to Egypt during the campaign and returned to take his seat in Commons and vote for the protective tariff without the formality of being sworn in. This " grave Constitutional act " vacated his seat " as if he were dead " and compelled the embarrassed publisher to stand again for election.

He followed in his father's philanthropic footsteps by giving £32,000 to the Middlesex Hospital and becoming its vice president, by endowing a John Astor professorship at the University of London, and by supporting the Borstal Institutions for delinquent boys, and the Boys' Clubs.

Three children were born to him, Gavin, Hugh, and John. It was noticeable that for the first time in Astor history a John did not carry the added Jacob. As for himself, he used the style " J. J. Astor." He maintained his city residence at his father's mansion, 18 Carlton House Terrace, and his country home at Hever Castle, and belonged to the Carlton, Marlborough, Turf, and Beefsteak Clubs.

CHAPTER *v*

Tory Democracy

TORY democracy bloomed in the Golden Age of the 1920's, and Lord and Lady Astor were its perfect expression. For post-war England there was no question of return to normalcy. The labouring masses who had fought in trench and munitions factory demanded that the government make good its promise of "a country fit for heroes to live in." Unless the Labour Party was to be handed the government on an electoral platter, Tories must prove they were the better "Socialists," adroit in giving as much as was needed to preserve their own control and as little as was consistent with maintaining the pre-war privileges which Toryism cherished. Stanley Baldwin and Ramsay MacDonald were the outstanding leaders between the break-up of Lloyd George's Coalition and the beginning of a new period of abysmal depression and wars in 1931. Eventually even the Labour leader himself found shelter under Tory democracy.

In building up the system delicately poised between privilege and concession in the Baldwin-MacDonald era, the Astors — Waldorf, Nancy, and John Jacob V — played key roles. Nancy was the showwoman, dramatizing issues through sharp speeches and heckling commentaries in Commons, and uniting Baldwin Tories, Lloyd George Liberals and MacDonald Labourites under a common roof at her St. James's Square home or at Cliveden. Waldorf served as philosopher and research chief — a kind of brain trust. His mind, most fruitful in the Astor line since the Founder's, keen in appraisal, sensitive to popular moods, trained in scientific humanism, was at ease with so-

cial problems arising under either Premier Baldwin or Premier MacDonald (between whom history was to show no unbridgeable chasm). Both Waldorf and his brother, one the owner of Torydom's leading Sunday paper, the other of its leading daily, stood at the controls of "the very mind of the nation." Given the inevitability of gradualism, which both MacDonald and the Astors postulated, and a grand sweep of time — whole generations perhaps — in which to work out social adjustments, there was no need for wars and revolutions, intelligent men of goodwill could adjust conflicts and merge differing interests to produce history's finest civilization. In that era the slums of London and Glasgow would disappear, and with them poverty and the aching social problems which racked Britain. Armies and navies and tariffs could be lowered gradually by international agreement and the whole world would live in brotherhood.

Independent Labourites from darkest Clydeside and South Wales scoffed at such gradualistic dreams. Choleric die-hard Tories, nursing gouty feet in sombre clubs along Piccadilly, growled at Baldwin's pampering the poor and called for an end to nonsense about public housing and the League of Nations. Radical Labourites believed that only a revolution could shatter capitalist control of Britain; the Die-Hards trusted to the professional Army for security at home and to the Navy for the perpetuation of the Empire.

On the anvil of the Astors' Plymouth constituency the bright young men of the pre-war *Round Table* had shaped the theory of Tory democracy. After the war this group, advanced in prestige and position, faced the problem of neutralizing Labour's growing power. Honey, not vinegar, was their method. Labour leaders were to be welcomed into their friendship, assured of sympathy, and shown the limitations of the budget. Conservative leaders were to be convinced that public housing, a minimum of social security, and acceptance of responsible trade unions were the cheapest form of revolution insurance.

Lady Astor was an admirable tool in the hands of these astute statesmen. She translated their cold theory into a warm emotionalism that made a workingman's dockyard constituency into a stronghold of Toryism. Of quick human sympathies, she was

Lady Bountiful to mothers and children, strewing nurseries, children's clubs, social centres for youth as she went — Virginia House and Astor Institute. Government-built apartment houses arose suitably inscribed with the names of Neville Chamberlain and other Tory democrat politicians. Non-conformist elements among labouring and middle-class groups approved of her war on the drink trade and the fact that she was not Church of England. Tories pardoned her for preaching the League of Nations and gradual disarmament, for she voted right on the Navy — Plymouth's bread and butter. Dock workers enthusiastically pro-Labour had to admit wryly that Lady Astor had far too much influence over their own wives.

Die-Hards among the Tories felt no great affection for their Plymouth M.P. but nevertheless gratefully acknowledged that she deprived Labour of what would otherwise have seemed a sure seat. They could not help believing that she was at heart a fellow traveller, if not with Stalin, at least with MacDonald. For her own part, she hated Die-Hards equally with Independent Labourites and Communists, and that too was a strength among many sober workingmen. When Lord Banbury, perfect embodiment of Die-Hardism, threatened to kill a social-reform measure through a Parliamentary trick, Lady Astor was beside herself. "I have tried kindness, I have tried rudeness," she cried; "now I shall try force. I shall hold to your coattails and you shall not rise."

"You are not strong enough," challenged the imperturbable Lord.

"Oh, you old villain, I'll get you yet," shrilled Nancy, while Conservatives shouted: "Sit down," "Shut up, Nancy," "Go back to America." Such scenes were good for working-class votes in Plymouth.

The Astors, backed by millions and equipped with mansions in town and country for entertainment, became the honest brokers between all political parties and factions. The biggest figures in Britain passed through their houses to be patronized, lionized, welded into a feeling of unity, convinced that there was a common ground because there was a common meeting-place for all. It was at 4 St. James's Square that David Kirk-

wood, stormy petrel of the Clydeside Independent Labour Party, met the Prince of Wales, and they talked for half an hour. It was said that such a meeting between the heir to the throne and a left-wing Socialist could have happened in no other country, and in England at no other place than the Astors'.

When in 1923 Labour became for the first time His Majesty's Loyal Opposition an awkward situation arose. None of the Labour leaders except MacDonald had ever met the King. Lady Astor furnished the bridge across which Labour and Royalty met, through a dinner at her town house.

The dinner was held, with the leaders of the three great parties breaking bread with their sovereign, in the First Supper. Lady Astor in 1931 could compliment herself for playing an important role in the "softening" process which resulted in tearing away an important section of the Labour top leadership from their party, and in demoralizing Labourites from top to bottom.

Labourites flew moth-like into the Astor candle. In Commons and at Plymouth Nancy delighted in ridiculing their philosophy, their tactics, in hurling insults at their followers and at their leaders, in uttering criticisms that seemed to them nonsensical, such as: "I believe in the capitalist system because I do not believe that men are born economically equal. . . . Even parents cannot guarantee the equality of their children. If they can't, what can the government do?" She would leave them spluttering helplessly at such statements as: "I am sure that when we get to be better Christians we can live under any system, but until we do I think it is base hypocrisy to talk about the complete equality of man."

Nevertheless official Labourites, Independent Labourite "wild men," and Communists delighted to receive invitations to Cliveden and St. James's Square, where she treated her Socialist guests like prankish boys caught at the jam jar. Many of them loved the luxury and magnificence of the Astors' great houses, the tacit recognition that they, after all, occupied some niche in the ruling caste of Britain, and admired the frank open-mindedness of the Astors in saying: "Unless the capitalist system can improve itself and settle some of these appalling prob-

lems that we have had with us, I am perfectly certain that before twenty-five years we will have another kind of system. That is why I want to see capitalism improved."

Many a Labourite emerged from the Astors' with a new view of sensible people of goodwill but opposing politics uniting to brighten up the world, of Lord Astor's good-natured personal proof that men of wealth like himself were doing their best to improve the lot of the people.

A superb hostess, Lady Astor brought together supercilious lords and magnates to examine the "wild men" at close range, while they in turn listened to the "other side." After a cheerful week-end at Cliveden, spent in good eating, good sports, and exhilarating talk, many a suspicious young Labourite discovered that under boiled shirts beat hearts of gold, rich in sympathy for the working classes. So concerned did Herbert Morrison, shepherd of young Labour M.P.'s, become that he warned his fledglings to beware of two menaces — the liquor bar of the House and the Astors' hospitality.

While his voluble energetic wife occupied the stage, Lord Astor busied himself behind scenes formulating an eclectic policy which seemed to be Conservative-Liberal-Labour. He disagreed with his collaborator Philip Kerr on the harsh terms imposed on Germany at Versailles, asked justice for that defeated country through the columns of his Sunday *Observer*, championed the League of Nations and closer world economic ties. He was an enemy of high prices and price combines, both domestic and international. He warned in 1919 of the reaction that was to come in 1921–2, and foresaw that a League confined to arbitrating disputes after they had arisen, and lacking authority in the economic field, would be hamstrung.

In 1921 he resigned as Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Health and thereafter was never officially connected with the government. He must have felt uncomfortable as the Bonar Law Ministry led an assault on social services, beginning with the nation's children, under well-worn slogans of "anti-waste" and "economy." He assailed government plans to subsidize raising of wheat and sugar in England (of all places),

and called for a five-year plan to foster livestock, fruit, and milk.

But it was as a champion of housing that this man, much of whose fortune had been founded in the slums of New York, put in his hardest work. Seated in the Astor Estate offices in New York in 1921, this prince of landlords presented views that were to be regarded as novel fifteen years later when coming from the White House. "We are willing to admit," he told reporters, "that our [British] housing program is from a narrow point of view uneconomic, but we are not willing to consider it narrowly. It must be viewed from the standpoint of the national balance sheet. In one sense it is insurance against revolution."

To astonished representatives of the New York press this English Lord said in a low-pitched, even-toned voice which breathed of Oxford: "All Europe is living on the edge of a volcano. Nobody knows how thin is the crust which supports civilization. But that is not the only consideration. The people of England are resolved never to go back to the old conditions from which they emerged to bear the burden of recent warfare." He continued with his argument for better housing: "It is bad business to allow the continuance of conditions which kill or cripple unnecessarily. It is well known that bad housing does have these results. We want to protect our birthrate and manhood. . . . The community cannot afford to have consumptives. . . . It is bad business to tolerate slums. Equally it is bad business for capital to have strikes, seething discontent and revolutions. In England there is a determination on the part of the working classes to have fuller lives and better homes."

"Our housing policy," he repeated, "is, in one sense, uneconomic. It will cost the taxpayers money, but it is cheaper than revolutions and the money invested will bear a high rate of interest later in improved physique, increased morality and reduced mortality."

New York reporters retired to record the interview for their papers and to wonder about the Conservative Lord whose program seemed pure Socialism. As for Lord Astor himself, he laboured under no consciousness of contradiction. He offered

two hundred pounds for the best essay exposing the fallacies and dangers of Socialism. He counselled the Labour Party to make up its mind whether it intended to abolish capitalism or make it work. To all he advised that shouting "Yah, Socialist! Yah, Bolshevist! Yah, Capitalist!" would solve no problems.

A champion of revitalized agriculture (he published a book on the subject), Lord Astor held no brief for landlords and no fears of nationalization of the soil. "Indeed," he stated, "it may well be argued that the necessary corollary of large national expenditures on agriculture is the nationalization of the land to ensure that the proceeds of that expenditure shall permit aiding the industry itself and not the mortgagees or landlords."

There was little juice in such ideas to stir multitudes. It was up to Lady Astor to transmute the gold of her husband's mind into brass for the political platform. Temperance reform and the nefarious doings of the drink trade were big issues.

The Astorian grievance against liquor was personal as well as social. Waldorf had had ample opportunity to watch its effects on his glowering father; in Nancy's own family alcohol had taken its victims. To critics who knew nothing of such personal reinforcements to a crusade, the Astors' hatred of liquor seemed a trifle ironic, for the Founder might have had precious little money to invest from the fur trade, and his descendants little to spend on temperance reform, if he had not plied the Indians with liquor. Indeed, the coat of arms which Lord Astor bore would have been more truthful if the fur-trader supporting one side of the shield had been handing a bottle to the Indian on the other side.

Nancy's incessant war on the Demon Rum made good newspaper copy on both sides of the Atlantic at a time when the whole world was watching America's noble experiment. Never ending, too, was her guerrilla fight with the "Socialists," her name for British Labourites, and as richly rewarding in newspaper notices that kept her to the fore as England's most public woman. In the 1923 election she announced that she was out "to fight the Socialists to the last ditch and leave them there. I am not doing that out of hatred of the Socialist [Labour] Party,

but for the great majority of the working men and women of the country."

And so she blazed her way forward as the first woman to sit in the Mother of Parliaments, the very symbol of her sex in politics to millions of other women on both sides of the Atlantic, enshrined at last in whatever immortality Mme Tussaud's waxworks could give her. Analysts of politics and personality pulled her apart to see what was the secret of her amazing success, but mostly they glossed over the fact that but for the millions the Founder had bestowed on his descendants, Nancy Langhorne would hardly have shone in the spotlight of two continents. Generally it was agreed that her wit fell short of brilliance and that her mind was far from supporting her outstanding position. Her best friend, Lord Lothian, the former Philip Kerr, became impatient: "Oh, Nancy, wait a minute! If you'd just think two minutes on any one subject you'd be the greatest woman in England."

The Astors' cozy philosophy, reinforced by feelings of innate superiority bred by 4 St. James's Square, Cliveden, a seat in Parliament, and world-wide fame, broke rudely in two when examined by hostile critics. They could cite endless contradictions: Lady Astor was all for goodwill but possessed the sharpest, shrillest tongue in British politics; "Aren't we all Socialists now?" she asked, and then berated those who clung to Socialist tenets; she was against war, but supported the World War; she was for the League of Nations, but worked for Anglo-Saxon hegemony of the world; all men were brothers under God, but black people were "niggers" (more with paternalistic contempt than malice); a divorcée, she fought long overdue divorce reform in England; the first woman to sit in Parliament, she lent neither name nor effort to the fight for woman suffrage; persistent assailant of mankind's worst enemy, greed, when exhibited by the lowly looking at upper-class England's magnificence, she did not believe in giving all to the poor.

Hating drink, she lived in luxury on a fortune based in part on the debauchment of the Indians; denouncing gambling, she was the wife of a lord whose racing stables at Cliveden were the pride of the land; afflicted by the sight of poverty and filth

so " that you are almost ashamed of being happy yourself," she denounced the tattered advance guard of a Welsh hunger march as a Communist plot to stir up trouble.

Her courage, high in championing birth control against fundamentalist critics, in bearding Tory ladies in their Primrose lairs and hurling taunts at Labour meetings, did not rise high enough for her to contemplate the contradiction between John Morley's " two nations " that were Britain. And so the high hopes of the post-war period, the gallant championing of peace, the League, and gradual disarmament, of social reform and individual philanthropy, began to shrivel under the blows of the Great Depression that started in 1929. Goodwill was not enough. Or, as Lady Astor put it, mankind was not yet perfect enough, it had not rooted greed, envy, and malice from its heart. By 1932 the shadows were blotting out that brave picture Lord and Lady Astor had painted on their triumphal tour through the States in 1922. Back again in America, Lord Astor declared that if disarmament fails, " I don't know what will happen to other world questions, economic or otherwise. So far as I have been able to test it, the man in the street in every country wants no more war. The trouble is that all nations will have to take the step simultaneously, and all are waiting for someone else to do it first. And I am sure of one thing, that unless we get some step in disarmament, there is chaos ahead." To these staunch advocates of Tory democracy, of the potency of goodwill, it must have seemed like the working out of a Greek tragedy on a world-wide scale, with no human force capable of halting the inevitable. But there was a ray of light in America — the new personality of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the President-elect. The Astors and the Roosevelts attended St. James's Episcopal Church at Hyde Park, the church of the Dutchess County squirearchy. The text was Matthew x:16: " Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

Major J. J. Astor, a far more thoroughgoing Tory than his brother, did not share Waldorf's catholic enthusiasms. Nancy's shrill goings-on in Parliament and on the platform offended Lady Violet's staid British feeling for the proprieties; relations

between the two Astor ladies were formal rather than cordial. John Jacob and his wife saw no harm in a drink and much harm in Nancy's demagogism and Waldorf's flirting with ideas which seemed radical to an unimaginative Tory.

Major Astor was every inch an imperialist bred in the Indian-service tradition, the perfect picture of the lean, taut Britisher who spoke moderately, fought bravely, and ruled cleverly. He followed the pattern of the ruling aristocracy: Eton, Oxford, the First Life Guards, India, war wounds, Honorary Colonel, Lieutenant of the City of London, president of the Empire Press Union, president of Dover College, director of the Great Western Railway, of Phœnix Life Assurance, of Hambros Bros. Bank, chairman of the Kent council of the British Legion, chairman of the Hurlingham Club (polo) committee, president of the Marylebone Cricket Club, husband of an earl's daughter.

Nothing illustrated better the temperate attitude of such a man than his suppression of Lady Houston's letter which she wanted read at the exhibit of the Everest Flight pictures in 1933. This Die-Hard lady had helped finance the expedition for reasons keenly shared by good imperialists but better left unsaid. For example she felt that in India there was a growing suspicion that "we Britons have lost our courage. This made me feel that some great deed of heroism might arouse India and make them remember that though they are a different Race — they are British Subjects — under the King of England — who is Emperor of India — *and what more can they want?*" Although Major Astor declined to read such an injudicious letter, she was not to be suppressed, much to the delight — as Astor had foreseen — of Indian Nationalists, who posted Lady Houston's letter from Bombay to Calcutta.

True son of William Waldorf, he was shy and nervous. Ill at ease at a Press Club luncheon in his honour, he spoke in a thin, low voice. His left hand crumpled up his coat pocket and then suddenly stopped when he realized he was betraying his nervousness, but in a moment his right hand was working convulsively in the other pocket.

The great annual event at Hever Castle was the party which the publisher of *The Times* threw for his staff. Hundreds of

employees swarmed over the estate — the black-coated editorial staff very respectable and respectful, the printers and pressmen jovial and even hilarious under Major Astor's liquid hospitality. Through the crowds moved the host, nervous, reserved, hesitant, trying hard to be genial.

Major Astor lacked the knack of verbalization. No journalist, he made no effort to use *The Times* for his own ideas, of which indeed he had none in any way different from the standard Tory variety. Whatever pronouncements he did make had a rather Hooverian flavour. When the Tories were busy turning out Labour in 1931 on a gold-panicking issue, he spoke of "general prosperity through industrial recovery," but was obliged in the following year to hope that the "economic blizzard" would blow itself out. His name was attached, in 1923, to a book prepared by a staff he financed to study "The Third Winter of Unemployment." The book concluded that the British workman was not responsible for his own unemployment, that he wanted to work, and that his plight was due to world conditions "aggravated by the very fact that Russian communism, following the destruction of capitalism, has obliterated foreign trade with that vast region."

He worked his Dover constituency much as Waldorf and Nancy worked Plymouth. He footed Conservative Party expenses, maintained the party agent at three thousand dollars a year, contributed to all the regular charities, kept a "licensed tent" at cricket matches to dispense beer and spirits.

Labourites complained of the "white corruption" of the electorate at Dover as much as at Plymouth. While Labour financed itself with a penny-a-month contribution from its members, manna fell from heaven, as it were, upon the Tory Party. At election time, in both Dover and Plymouth, there was a staff imported from London to help canvass the vote, and on election day fleets of motor cars to carry voters to the polls, which quit about six p.m. so as not to carry possible Labourites. His opponents complained of a democracy which gave all the breaks to rich Tories; nevertheless in Dover Labour could congratulate itself on rising from a negligible position to 9,000 votes in 1931

and 14,000 in 1935 with an obscure labouring man as candidate opposed to the great Astor prestige and wealth.

More in sympathy with her younger brother than with Lord Astor was Pauline, who in 1904 had married Lieutenant Colonel Herbert Henry Spender-Clay, a fellow officer in the Life Guards with Major J. J. He, too, was the very image of an English gentleman: Eton, Sandhurst, a medal with six clasps from the Boer War, Justice of the Peace for Surrey, and Conservative M.P. for bucolic Tonbridge, Kent. He headed a small group of M.P.'s who met periodically to discuss Parliamentary questions. A true Colonel Blimp, he deprecated peace talk as discouraging recruiting, was a champion of the rights of the Indian princes, said too much sob-stuff had been written about the masses in that sub-continent. Control of India should be kept in London, for a weak central government would be bad for trade.

The spectacle of Lloyd George peddling his memoirs to the American press was painful to Spender-Clay. He urged pensions for retired prime ministers so they would not have to publish official reminiscences. "I hate the idea," he said, "of an ex-Minister of the Crown having to produce something highly-coloured — if it was not highly-coloured, it would not sell. I do not like the idea of an ex-Prime Minister writing for the syndicated press of America for gain."

He died in 1937 leaving an estate of £335,000, of which the government took £111,000. A true Tory to the end, he left £500 to the Tory agent in Tonbridge.

His daughter, Rachel Pauline, was married in 1929 to the Honourable David Bowes-Lyon, youngest son of the Earl of Strathmore and Kinghorne, and brother of Elizabeth, Duchess of York, later to be Queen Elizabeth. That a granddaughter of his would be an in-law to a Queen was a consummation that old William Waldorf had never dared to dream of, yet so closely did the House he had established on British soil touch the hem of royalty's robes!

Rachel's older sister, Phyllis Mary, was married in 1932 to Philip Bouverie Bowyer Nichols, of the diplomatic service.

By 1935 Parliament counted five Astors: Waldorf in the Lords; Nancy in Commons since 1920 for Plymouth; her son Bill (William Waldorf II) in Commons for East Fulham, a London constitutency; Lord Willoughby de Eresby, his brother-in-law, in Commons for Rutland; and John Jacob V in Commons for Dover. In addition Ronald Tree, who had married a niece of Nancy's, was also enrolled in Commons. All were Conservatives.

It was ironic that Viscount Astor, who had tried so hard to get rid of his patent of nobility, should have turned up finally as a leading example of the "modern cousinhood"—the domination of the House of Commons by relatives in the House of Lords. Those who believed that Liberal-Labourism had clipped the claws of the Lords needed but to inspect Commons to find lordlets, wives, nephews, and nieces of lords, and men who would by inheritance become lords, holding key positions in the House devoted, presumably, to representing the community. Bill Astor, who one day would be My Lord Astor, was a prime example, or Willoughby, who would some day be Earl of Ancester, or Nancy, who was a Lady, or John Jacob V, the son of a lord, who, it was said, coveted a title for himself.

Nine Cabinet ministers in Commons were in the "cousinhood." Those who believed that the upper House had become a moribund body needed to be reminded that in 1939 the Foreign Secretary, the Minister for Education, and the Secretary of State for India were full-blown aristocrats; that in addition the Cabinet included a marquess, three earls, two viscounts, a baron, and a baronet. In a nation which described itself as a democracy, the "cousinhood" seemed to give the House of Lords control over the House of Commons.

CHAPTER *vi*

Road to War

EVERY Tory victory since the war, Labour protested, had been won on an electoral swindle: Hang the Kaiser, in 1918; the Zinoviev letter, in 1924; save the gold standard, in 1931. The general election of 1935, fought by Conservatives on a platform pledging allegiance to the League and to a peace policy, resulted in another Tory triumph and was, said Labour, equally a swindle. But in 1935 that was regarded as the embittered plaint of a party badly whipped. It could not be known then that a Parliament elected to preserve peace would proclaim war, that a party pledging allegiance to the League would soon relegate Geneva to discussion of topics no more exciting than Lord Astor's nutrition conference.

In a world shaken to its core by economic disasters, many were regarding uneasily war's looming shadow. The Japanese Army, tearing up treaties as it went, had taken over Manchuria and was near the gates of Peiping. The League had sent Lord Lytton to the Far East to inspect the Japanese militarists at first hand; young Bill Astor was part of the entourage. Then Mussolini had scrapped a few more treaties with his attack on Abyssinia, and Major John Jacob Astor became indignant.

The publisher of *The Times* minced no words in addressing his constituents: " The dictator of Italy has repudiated his country's signatories and has broken its pledges and flouted and challenged the rest of the world. Is England at his bidding and threat to break its pledges and scuttle from its obligations? If England does that, what faith or confidence could anyone have

in international agreements in the future? The League of Nations in its activities has developed and almost created a world conscience. A situation like the present is an acid test for the League, and I believe that on its success or failure in dealing with it the future of the League depends. The tactful and firm handling by our representatives at Geneva of a delicate situation has vindicated the League and we have established the sanctity of international agreements and kept alive the hope of future peace through collective action and security."

That seemed plain enough for those who believed in the League and collective security.

His sister-in-law Nancy was saying very little about either the League or Mussolini at Plymouth. She was promising women co-operators more maternity clinics, equal pay for equal work, reduction of working hours, more nursery schools, and birth control. In Parliament she was urging more unemployment assistance and " begging " the government not to run away from the issue just " because these Labour people are agitators, particularly in Wales." Labourites thought she called the Welsh hunger marchers " a ragged army," and the demonstrators flung out a banner: " Lady Astor's Ragged Army." She hastily explained she meant the Labour M.P.'s were a ragged army.

Hannen Swaffer, the journalist, spoke against her at Plymouth. " I am, among other things, a film critic," he said. " I have often attacked American talkies. Nancy is one of the worst American talkies I know."

Her son Bill (William Waldorf II) was making his political debut in that election. He had served a gentlemanly apprenticeship before reaching his twenty-eighth year. He had been with Lord Lytton to Manchuria, had done Geneva on Sir John Simon's staff, had accompanied the Duke of Kent on tours of the distressed areas. He had paid his own expenses (he was independently wealthy, for his grandfather had skipped Waldorf to divide stocks and bonds among Waldorf's children), talked easily, kept his ears open, and made friends. He was on the escalator bound to bring him up toward the seats of power.

In the typical way Bill was introduced to East Fulham, a seat on the western rim of London. This borough alternated be-

tween dismal streets of dreary stone and brick tenements and quiet purlieus of older mansions and new apartment houses. Its mixed middle- and working-class composition was reflected in the 1931 election, which returned a Tory by 14,000 votes, and in a 1933 by-election that returned a Labourite by nearly 5,000. The Tories were anxious to reclaim East Fulham; Bill was anxious to anoint the machine in the way rich candidates must.

"Now," Nancy told East Fulham Conservatives, "you have a well-seasoned, well-trained and well brought up candidate. What is more, he has his mother to see that he goes straight when he gets there. You have the opportunity to send a young man to the House of Commons with his mother there to look after him. No other constituency in England can say that."

Trained in British foreign policy under Sir Samuel Hoare, young Bill Astor let the Tory cat out of the bag. He said the Labour Party was trying to get England into war by urging an oil embargo on Mussolini and the closing of the Suez Canal to Italian troops. To cross Signor Mussolini, he warned, was "to turn a small war into a big one." Was it the irresponsible talk of a youngster in politics, or a more candid exposition of the Astorian mind that could be gained from *The Times* and the *Observer*? Labourites, Liberals, and League Tories were suspicious.

All three Astors — Nancy, Major J. J., and Bill — were elected. Bill became vocal in the House and in letters to his uncle's paper, *The Times*. He inveighed against sanctions "which might provoke war" with Italy, urged Britain to negotiate with Hitler, and threatened France with the loss of British aid because of her Soviet alliance. The elder Astors maintained a discreet silence, but Sir Samuel Hoare (forced to resign from the Foreign Office because of the uproar caused by his pro-Mussolini attitude) invited Bill to become his Parliamentary private secretary in the Admiralty and later in the Home Office.

Bill's forthrightness created a scene in Commons during the debate on a commission to inquire into trading in women and children in Hong Kong. He asked: "Will the Colonial Secretary consult the wishes of the inhabitants of Hong Kong before making this change in their social system?" Nancy was out-

raged. "I am surprised at you," she cried at her son. "Spank him!" cried Labour members. Nancy sat down, tongue-tied for once, and Bill was seen to blush.

In 1936 the shape of the world to come could be seen through the red mist over Spain's battlefields. Bill was for non-intervention, the policy under which Il Duce and Der Führer intervened, scorned a suggestion in Commons that a commission of inquiry be sent to Spain, and defended against the East Fulham Labour Party's protest the appearance in Commons of Marquis de Merry del Val to defend General Franco.

Certainly the picture in 1936 bore little resemblance to that brave new world which Lord and Lady Astor had seen in the early 1920's with its high hopes for the League of Nations, peace, gradual disarmament, goodwill and understanding, school nurseries, and the barring of minors from the pubs — Utopia to be won step by step through Parliamentary motions and conferences at Geneva, Locarno, Cannes. Under the hammer-blows of the Great Depression the nations were shrinking back into isolation; in Germany isolation was being straitjacketed into tribal worship.

And just as the world had changed, so had Lord Astor. That paragon of the humane virtues and the better life could read each Sunday in his own *Observer* bitter tirades against the Ethiopians battling for their independence, and veiled praise for Hitler as a realist who was winning respect and a long overdue place in the sun for his people.

There could be no doubt that Lord Astor agreed with his editor, the sharp-tongued Garvin. Herr Hitler was a fact, to be analysed as coldly as Japanese pretensions in the Far East, Indian aspirations for independence, the Italian bid for control of the Mediterranean, or the Soviet conception, for the nonce in abeyance, of world revolution. Astor was busier than ever studying such problems because in 1935 he had been elected chairman of the council of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, whose Chatham House lay in the selfsame St. James's Square with his own house. To such a reasonable man, there was nothing unreasonable about Hitler's claim for colonies. Arguments advanced by the Nazis were "about as sound or

unsound as some of our economic policies." Their claims for an imperial position not lower than Holland's, Belgium's, or Portugal's seemed modest enough. It was said the Nazis, with their peculiar racial beliefs, would oppress the natives, but how about the Congo or Morocco, or "possibly even some of the lands over which we exercise jurisdiction"? "Unless and until there is some adjustment of the colonial issue, there can be no confidence or any sense of security in Europe, nay, there must be an ever running sore, liable at any moment to burst."

Such a statement, published in a letter to *The Times*, astonished Labourites who had been Lord Astor's guests. Did he not know that this man Hitler who now demanded colonies had obliterated the German trade-union movement, murdered many of its leaders, hounded others into concentration camps?

His statement also astonished Liberals. Did not Lord Astor know that this man Hitler had crucified Freedom, broken the press, hunted all parties but his own into underground corners, loosed a modern pogrom against Jews, turned Germany back into the Middle Ages? Why should a liberal like Lord Astor deign to traffic with a dictator standing with one foot in A.D. 1200 and another in some dim collectivist era of the future?

Astor may well have sympathized with Labourites and Liberals in their pictures of a Hitler, his hands dripping with the blood of unionists, Communists, Socialists, Jews, fellow Nazis and the little Austrian Premier, Dollfuss. But after all weren't such denunciations hysterical? Whose hands did not, as it were, drip blood? Were the hands of the British Empire so clean that they could be used to point at Hitler's? And, for that matter, were the hands of an Astor to be dissociated from the blood on old John Jacob's fur trade, from the blood of thousands who had died coughing and writhing in the dark Astor dungeons on Manhattan's East Side? Guilt must have rested heavily on the conscience of this sensitive Astor who was ready to do business with "the butcher of Berlin."

So late in April 1937 My Lords Astor and Lothian hied themselves to Berlin to inspect Herr Hitler's hands and mind. The visit aroused intense interest in diplomatic circles all over Europe, but neither the German press nor Lord Astor's *Observer*

carried more than a decorous item about a journey so fraught with portents. Whatever passed between the two noble English Lords and Hitler, Göring, and Goebbels went unrecorded, but it was notable that soon afterward young Bill Astor, along with Lord Lothian, joined the Anglo-German Fellowship, fountainhead in England of Nazi propaganda. The Fellowship was cultivated by many high persons in the City as a platform for Herr von Ribbentrop, the Nazi envoy who was making such dashing conquests in Mayfair, but high government officials stood discreetly to one side. Bill, Parliamentary private secretary to the Home Office, was the only Tory with official position who joined.

Lord Astor gave himself over to a contemplation of the world in which the British Lion and the Nazi Brownshirt could live in peace. There was no need of talking, he said, about "predatory powers," for were not Britain and France as predatory as Germany and Italy? The difference was that one set had devoured the prey, and the other were hungry. The status quo was not good enough to be fought over. The League must be remodelled into a consultative agency, sans sanctions and devoted to exemplary humanitarian purposes such as the commission on nutrition over which Lord Astor was then presiding. Into such a League, with an amended Covenant, Germany and Italy must be enticed, "trusting more to the methods of conference than coercion to carry us on for some time to the next epoch, when a sobered world may be ready to consider a further progressive stage — world government — namely, a central authority in Geneva to which League members delegate certain of their sovereign rights."

Thus the bold declaration of a man, profound in his analysis, sounding in a letter to *The Times* of September 15, 1937 the clarion call for World Government which years later would echo to cheer on a new bloody crusade. But the Opposition was contemptuous of a policy which called for conciliation now with Hitler as a prelude to "a further progressive stage." Certainly, they inquired, Astor had not read *Mein Kampf,* could not know that the only world government in which the Nazis were interested was their own. *Mein Kampf,* he answered,

"was written chiefly in 1924 when Herr Hitler was in prison and when the whole German race had been more embittered by the disastrous French invasion of the Ruhr than by the War itself." His critics must remember that "perpetual hymns of hate settle nothing." Hostility to Hitler and Mussolini "must inevitably lead either to war or to diplomatic humiliation."

By the time Neville Chamberlain replaced Stanley Baldwin as Prime Minister in mid-1937, the Conservatives had abandoned the position on which they had been elected two years before. The League had been scrapped. Mussolini, at whom Major J. J. Astor had levelled hot words, was now being courted in order "to split the Axis" (although Lord Plymouth's non-interventionism shut its eyes to the co-ordinated Axis operations in Spain). Chamberlain was the man for Astor. They had worked together during the World War, and in the post-war period had supported each other in Tory democracy's housing and social-service program. A great Conservative meeting was held in Albert Hall to greet the new Prime Minister, and who more appropriate was there than Lord Astor to preside over the meeting? The nation, he reminded the audience, had been saved in 1931 by Ramsay MacDonald and Stanley Baldwin, but Chamberlain as Chancellor of the Exchequer was their agent in bringing the country through to recovery.

Chamberlain's elevation marked the end of pretence in advocating the collective security upon which the Tories had gained their impressive victory of 1935. Now the decks were clear for the Astorian policy.

There were two groups in England, Lord Astor warned — a war party bent on breaking Germany, and a peace party determined to take many risks in giving Germany the equality it demanded. The war party, he said, were gambling on a conflict in which the Dominions might desert Britain, and at a time when the Empire faced grave problems in the Far East, in the Mediterranean, in the Arab world, and in India. Such strategy served Communism, "which desires to see non-Communist countries at war in the belief that the Revolution must follow."

Major Astor for once sympathized fully with his brother. An

empire-builder wished to come to terms with empire-holders, wished to become blood brother to imperialists. As *the* Mrs. Astor had said of Mrs. Vanderbilt, the time had come to " recognize " such honest ambitions. Hitler and Mussolini were formidable factors in Europe; they could turn their fury on the Empire, or upon Bolshevism. Major Astor agreed with Lord Astor that the latter alternative was better. If the Soviets hoped to see Fascism and Imperialism locked in mortal strife, would it not be cleverer instead to see that Fascism and Communism knifed each other? In the process quite a few innocent bystanders would suffer — Ethiopia, Spain, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Albania — and quite a few precious qualities which had marked advancing civilization would have to be jettisoned — the sanctity of international treaties, the rights of small nations to exist, the protection of minorities, the emancipation of Jews. Never mind, *Realpolitik* ruled. The world presented a triangular equation — the Empire, Fascism, Communism — that must be solved in favour of the Empire.

Those who had based their hopes on a common front of European nations to hold in check the ambitions of the Italian and German regimes were ridiculed. " When I hear of pooled security," said Nancy, " I think of fooled security." After the smaller nations had been informed rather plainly by the shift in British policy that united action through the League had been abandoned, they withdrew along their various paths and Nancy could announce that " to talk about collective security is to talk of something which does not exist except in the minds of a few hopeful people."

It became fashionable in Mayfair to agree with elegant Herr von Ribbentrop, exponent of the new ideas. The lines were drawn more tightly against the Jews. Liberal newspapers began to report a growing anti-Semitism in Lady Astor's casual remarks. There was said to have been a painful scene at a meeting of the Conservative Party's foreign affairs committee when she attacked a member on racial lines, as well as at a private dinner of the English-Speaking Union. " Is not this Lady's spiritual home in Berlin? " asked the liberal *News-Chronicle*.

Her shift contrasted with earlier sentiments when, at a

women's meeting in 1934 to protest anti-Jewish outrages in Germany, she advised German Jewish women to stay at home and fight. When Gerhart Seger, a Social Democrat, escaped from a Nazi refugee camp and found asylum in England, she helped to get his wife and infant daughter out of Germany.

In 1936, so completely had her attitude changed, she was amazed and dismayed at the extent of anti-Nazi feeling in the United States. She attributed it to the Jews and Communists. English Jewry was outraged that Lady Astor should try to stifle the world protest against Nazi brutality. She replied in the *Morning Post* to what she termed incorrect reporting of her remarks:

"I said that having supported the Zionist cause I feel bound to issue a note of warning about the anti-German propaganda that was being conducted in America by the Jews (and by the Communists) and the bitter anti-German feeling being created. One would imagine from this propaganda that Germany was the only European country with a dictatorship and alone had attacked religion. There are in America (as there are here) certain forces which are doing their utmost to keep Britain and Germany at loggerheads, perhaps even to get them involved in a war. The result of such a conflict would imperil civilization, whoever was victorious. We should be on our guard to prevent the policy of either Britain or America being unduly influenced by this propaganda."

It was a far cry from the starry-eyed idealism of the Astors in the 1920's when they protested undying devotion to world peace, the League of Nations, disarmament, and social reform. But since then the world had been rocked by a cataclysm almost as savage as the World War. Idealism had been ballast to be jettisoned in a Europe rocking in the first waves of another frightful storm. For all their native kindliness and goodwill, the Astors now were acting with the same ruthless decision that the Founder had shown when there was money to be made or saved. Thanks to their policy, aimed to save a dying peace, England was hastening to the brink of war.

CHAPTER *vii*

Götterdämmerung

With growing interest a lone journalist watched the guest lists at Cliveden, listened to Lady Astor's outbursts in Commons, and studied editorials in Lord Astor's Sunday *Observer* and Major Astor's daily *Times*. He was looking for clues that would explain the source of the change in British foreign policy since 1935. His name was Claud Cockburn and he edited a confidential news-bulletin, the *Week*, which was read in all the chancelleries of Europe because he published stories which staid British dailies believed were "too hot to handle." Trained in the Washington and Berlin bureaus of *The Times*, Cockburn twitched for inner meanings and covert significance. In the winter of 1937–8 he broke his sensational "Cliveden set" exposé in the *Week*, charging that the Astors' rural residence had become "Britain's second Foreign Office," that statesmen there debated shifting foreign policy, that from these discussions came those remarkable letters of Lord Astor to his brother's paper, *The Times*, the visit to Berlin with Lord Lothian, the vehemence of the anti-Czech editorials in the *Observer*, the elevation of Chamberlain to be Prime Minister.

The *Manchester Guardian* checked Cockburn's story and published it. The *News-Chronicle* in London took it up. Eager American correspondents, flattered that American-born political leaders should have such a guiding hand in shaping British policy, cabled the news, and the American press splashed it in headlines. Correspondents also cabled background stories on the suddenly spotlighted "Cliveden Set." The *New York Times*

headlined: "FRIENDS OF HITLER STRONG IN BRITAIN — FEAR OF COMMUNISM IMPELS MANY MEN OF WEALTH AND OF THE MIDDLE CLASS"

"The so-called 'Cliveden set,'" explained the *New York Times* correspondent, "are widely regarded as the most influential of Germany's sympathizers in England. . . . The apparent strength of Germany's case in this country comes from the fact that Germany's best friends are to be found in the wealthiest 'upper crust' of British life. The strongholds of German influence are aristocracy and the 'city of London,' both of which are traditional sources of the Conservative party's leadership and power. Joachim von Ribbentrop, Germany's foreign minister, knew his England better than some of his critics when he urged Britain to join the anti-Communist crusade.

"For British aristocracy by its very nature is more hostile to communism than fascism. When men like Londonderry or Viscount Rothermere or Lord Astor have political nightmares the ogre of their imagination is Russia, not Germany. Menace to their wealth, their social position, as they see it, is the creed of communism, and, in their minds, whatever endangers themselves endangers England."

Milton Bronner, American syndicate writer, reported: "Solemn J. L. Garvin, editor of Lord Astor's Sunday paper, the *Observer*, wrote ponderous editorials burning incense before Hitler, adjuring Britain to be nice to Germany and lamming into the Czechs with as much vigor and acrimony as displayed by Joseph Goebbels, Nazi minister of propaganda. . . .

"But the best work for the pro-Germans was done by Lady Astor herself in her frequent parties. Hither came Lord Halifax, now foreign minister, here came the Marquess of Lothian, a former Liberal, now one of the leaders of the be-nice-to-Germany school. Prime Minister Chamberlain and his wife were week-end guests."

The *Washington Post*, in a full-page article, described the downfall of Czechoslovakia six months before it happened. Its article was headed: "ASTOR COUNTRY HOME BECOMING 'REAL' CENTER OF BRITAIN'S FOREIGN POLICY — EMPIRE'S NEW LEADERS FRIENDLY TO FASCISM — *They Prefer*

It to Socialism, Which They Consider the Alternative, and See Virtues in Mussolini's Record in Italy"

"'The British government has given its blessing to Hitler's impending annexation of German-speaking Czechoslovakia, it was learned here today from sources close to Cliveden.'

"Such a dispatch, under a London date line, may greet the eyes of American newspaper readers some morning in 1938 or 1939, unless several informed correspondents have been deceived in their search for the power behind Britain's newest orientation of foreign policy."

Editor & Publisher, organ of the American newspaper industry, salaamed before Major Astor when he visited the States by publishing "the under-cover story of the power" of his great paper. "*The Times,*" it said, "has been advocating a rapprochement with Italy and Germany. Last fall there were held a series of conferences at Cliveden, the Thames River estate of Major Astor." If *Editor & Publisher,* which prided itself on meticulous accuracy, erred in giving him the ownership of Cliveden, the point was not too material, for Geoffrey Dawson, his editor, was a frequent visitor there.

"Once more," concluded the newspaper organ, "the 'Thunderer' with its comparatively small circulation of 198,000 is again the maker and breaker of men and policies of the British Empire, a role which few papers in the world have even been able to equal."

Appeasement, which presented such enticing vistas to the Astors, was the policy hammered out by the intellectual pink of Torydom confronted by confusing alternatives. If co-operation with Hitler and Mussolini panned out, several desirable objectives could be secured. The Empire would be saved from a shattering war, France would be forced to drop her middle- and working-class government and her Soviet alliance, the League would be diverted into purely humanitarian channels, America would be hitched into an anti-Japanese alliance to conserve Anglo-French interests in the Far East, a Four-Power Pact would become the Concert of Europe, and the Soviets would be isolated from European affairs. Nazi belligerency could be

diverted from the Empire toward the Ukraine, with both Germany and Russia weakened by war.

It was a delicate plan, and hinged on varying factors. At home Labour would surely denounce any collaboration with Hitler, the executioner of the German labour movement; the Liberals would feel their conscience outraged by alliances with the fountainhead of darkness; anti-German Tories would cry treason; the Jews would consider themselves betrayed. The League of Nations Union would be appalled by the perfidy of a government elected on a pro-League platform. Liberal opinion in America, a first-class asset in any war, would be antagonized.

But to the guardians of a distraught Empire in 1938 the game looked worth while. Had not the Emperor Valens called in the Visigoths to guard Rome against the Scythians? True, the barbarians had slain Valens and later sacked Rome, but the analogy would not go so far, for Britons were master strategists, born to divide and rule. Hitler, the modern Visigoth, could be flattered, cajoled, diverted from looting the Empire by the Ukraine's golden grain.

The dominating motive for this strategy was fear of war. The Astors were no pacifists, but they feared another World War would shatter the Empire and the social system of Britain. The First World War had crippled the Astor Estate under a barely endurable burden of taxation; might not the second extinguish it? Hateful as Hitler might be, collaboration with him was preferable to the threatened cataclysm.

With Chamberlain in power ("I liked his tidy mind," said Nancy), the appeasement policy was applied to tormented Europe. Many journals sniffed suspiciously. Geoffrey Dawson in *The Times* was contemptuous of such: "The peace-minded can best serve peace for the moment by ceasing to agitate themselves and others with morbid fancies about corrupt understandings, trampled Austrians and bartered Czechs." J. L. Garvin was even more caustic in the *Observer:* "worthy lunatics . . . windy apostles of crazy crusades . . . a frantic medley of Left Front excitements and Tory Die-Hard delusions." Her-

bert Morrison, the Labour leader, wondered "if a great Sunday newspaper owned by Lord Astor has a certain feeling that it is the organ of the official point of view of Germany and Italy."

Visiting America, Lord Astor warned that if the white nations embroiled themselves in internecine strife, Japan would make herself ruler of the Orient, to the destruction of Anglo-American interests. Peace in western Europe was imperative in face of the yellow peril. The British and American Navies could rule the seas.

Anthony Eden was forced out of the Foreign Office and Lord Halifax stepped in. Hitler took over Austria, while the new Foreign Minister, a man of goodwill, wrung his hands: "Horrible, horrible, I never thought they would do it." Winston Churchill, the "Die-Hard Tory," rose in wrath to denounce Chamberlain as a "good Lord Mayor of Birmingham in a lean year." Then Mussolini's conquest of Ethiopia was blessed by the Anglo-Italian treaty.

This succession of events astounded liberal opinion in England and America, and the popular clamour led Lord Astor to hope that the government would not "stop the policy they had undertaken." It was at this juncture that Cockburn released his exposé of the "Cliveden set" in the *Week*. Lord Lothian, stung to the quick, denounced the story of the "second Foreign Office" as "a complete mare's nest. It was invented originally by a communist paper and spread in pamphlets issued by the Communist Party. There is no such set. I should know, because I am supposed to be a member of it. The real motive is to stir up class feeling and get us into an anti-fascist war of which the sole beneficiary would be world communism."

The Astors were deeply perturbed by the "Cliveden set" story, which, if unchallenged, could so quickly undermine the prestige they had gained among liberal forces in Britain and America. Lord Astor wrote to *The Times*, Lady Astor to the *Herald*. Her letter to the Labour organ was the more pointed:

"I have received so many letters from Labour friends asking whether there is a group which meets at Cliveden and which exercises a sinister influence on politics, and also asking whether I am a Fascist or have fascist leanings, that I should be grateful

Cliveden, the home of Viscount and Lady Astor

PHOTO, WIDE WORLD

The *Mrs. Astor's home in New York, gathering-place of "the 400"*

PHOTO, BROWN BROTHERS

if you would give me space to correct certain absolute untruths.

"I also write to you because the *Daily Herald* has not used the fiction about the Cliveden Set as other less careful publications have done.

"In politics, no one objects to hard blows and strong criticism but in a Democracy it is essential that the public should be able to base their judgment on facts and not on fiction.

"A few years ago I used to be called a Communist and accused of pro-Soviet leanings because I visited Russia with Mr. Bernard Shaw and because I supported those who wanted a trade pact with Russia. But I was not then a Communist any more than I am now a Fascist.

"I believe in Democracy and in Parliamentary government and am opposed to all forms of dictatorship, whether Fascist, Nazi or Communist.

"It is true that as an individual I have supported those who are trying to correct by negotiations the mistake of the Peace Treaties or to remove some of the grievances of other countries whatever their forms of internal government and that I favour the attempts to establish a better atmosphere between Britain and France on one side and Germany and Italy on the other.

"It is also true that I opposed attempts to interfere from outside with the internal government of Russia (e.g. by helping the White Russians under Koltchak) or more recently of Italy, Germany and Spain.

"In supporting non-intervention in Spain I realize that this is an unsatisfactory policy but I believe any alternative would increase foreign intervention on both sides and would extend the civil war in Spain into European war.

"There is no group which week-ends at Cliveden in the interests of fascism or anything else.

"For many years my husband and I have entertained men and women of all political creeds (including Bolshevik), of all nationalities, of all religious faiths, of all social interests.

"As regards the imaginary Cliveden Set, some who are said to belong to it have never been to Cliveden, others not for years.

"I was actually away in America and my house was closed

when according to a communist leaflet a weekend took place at Cliveden.

"The story is a myth.

"Let us discuss and disagree on politics, but not confuse the public mind by totally untrue tales."

Nancy then turned to the American press. America, she insisted, was being misled by Jewish and Communist propaganda. What better, then, than to arrange a luncheon where newspaper men from the States might meet the misunderstood Prime Minister personally? On May 10, 1938 the affair was held at her home at 4 St. James's Square. "Gentlemen," she announced, "here is our own Dictator." Under direct questioning such as the President might be subjected to in the White House, Chamberlain told of his plans to bring Germany and Italy into a Four-Power Pact. And then, in a momentous statement which, had they known it, might have saved the Czechs six months of hell, the Prime Minister revealed to the thunderstruck journalists the fact that he favoured the break-up of the Czech Republic and the annexation of its Sudeten districts to Germany. But he was not to be quoted; the luncheon was strictly "off the record."

Inspired stories appeared in the American press outlining the substance of his remarks. Liberal and Labour M.P.'s cross-examined him in the House, but he dodged: "I do not feel called upon to confirm or deny anything that appeared in a newspaper without my authority. . . . I am not going to attempt to deny or affirm anything in connection with a statement in this paper or a statement in any other paper at this time or any other time on matters of this or any other kind." Members debated whether the interview had been held. Nancy interrupted: "I would like to say that there is not a word of truth in it." Her denial created a tempest in a teapot; the noble lady's veracity was called into question. Later she explained:

"I never had any intention to deny that the Prime Minister had attended a luncheon in my house. The Prime Minister did so attend, the object being to enable some American journalists who had not previously met him to do so privately and informally. What I did deny, and still deny, is the suggestion that what took place was an interview. An interview is a meeting

arranged with a view of communication of information intended specifically to be made the subject of articles in the press."

Hitler was able to draw the correct conclusions; Henlein became more insistent on autonomy for the Sudetenland. Lord Astor nodded his head benignly; "reasonable," was his word. Then on September 8, 1938 *The Times* thundered the doom of the Czechs across Europe. In an editorial that shook Prague, Paris, and Moscow it stated that although autonomy had been granted, still Germany was not satisfied. From that Major Astor's paper concluded that the German population did not find itself at ease within the Czech Republic, and that "it might be worth while" for Prague to ponder the advantages of greater national homogeneity to be gained through sacrificing the Sudeten area. Editor Garvin of Lord Astor's paper was more direct: the time had come, he wrote, when "the stinking Czech sausage should be crushed."

Did *The Times* speak for the Foreign Office? The Foreign Office answered that *The Times* spoke only for itself. History answered a few weeks later. Chamberlain came back from Munich with "peace for our time" and an agreement between Germany and Britain "never to go to war with one another again."

Nancy sat in Commons, elated by the triumph of appeasement. Various party leaders laid laurels at the feet of the Prime Minister. One voice was raised off-key, that of Winston Churchill: "I will begin by saying what everybody would like to ignore or forget but which must nevertheless be stated, namely, that we have sustained a total and unmitigated defeat, and that France has suffered even more than we have."

Lady Astor: "Nonsense."

Later in his speech Churchill paraphrased Chamberlain's remarks about Czechoslovakia: "We are talking about countries which are a long way off and of which, as the Prime Minister might say, we know nothing." At this point Nancy interrupted again. "The noble lady says that very harmless allusion is —"

Lady Astor: "Rude."

Churchill: "She must very recently have been receiving her finishing course in manners."

Nancy's impatience with Churchill reflected her annoyance with the Czechs. For months she had been telling visiting Americans that Czechoslovakia was a " crazyquilt " nation, that the Czechs were " nuisances." Britain, she explained, was woefully weak in the air and not prepared for war, nor was France or Russia. Revelations were made of Britain's air debility; it was recalled that in 1934, when the Nazis began to build up their air force, Lady Astor had said: "We are not afraid of being the fifth air power because it is quality and not quantity that counts in the end." But was the Russian air force weak, too? She disposed of that by another luncheon at 4 St. James's Square.

Charles A. Lindbergh had just returned from the Soviet Union, where he had been fêted by aviation leaders. He was invited to the Astors' to meet leading British personages. The affair was strictly private, but reports leaked out. The Soviet air force, Lindbergh was reported to have said, was demoralized in spirit and not at all fearful in size. If England and France were hoping to balance their deficiency by counting on Russia, they were deceiving themselves.

Liberal opinion in America writhed under the impact of Munich. An anniversary luncheon was being given at the Astor Hotel and greetings were read from all parts of the world. The only one met with silence was Nancy Astor's. Westbrook Pegler surveyed the British scene and reported:

" Now and again we in this country feel a little impatient with ourselves for submitting to the constant criticism of our manners, habits and all by visiting British authors and lecturers. I am not saying we shouldn't be annoyed, for these chittering sopranos do become a nuisance, but what do you suppose are the feelings of the poor English people toward us, considering that their government has just about been taken over now by a clique of purse-proud snobs exported from the United States — the Astors and the Nancy Langhorne that was?

" The Astors struck it rich in the United States and then, finding the fox hunting wasn't so good in this country, and finding the lower classes a little too ready to sound off at the lip, this

Astor group hightailed it off for Europe, where they order such things much better.

"In time, with their American money, they attained aristocratic rank, and now they run the good old *Times* of London, which, in the recent embarrassment with Adolf Hitler, laid down the course to be followed by the British government. They are the so-called Cliveden set, and Nancy obviously possesses, or pretends to, more influence than the queen herself.

"Nancy is a born Virginia fox hunter, one of the old county set, very dashing and spirited and all that, and she was at one time known as the beautiful Nancy Astor, although, from her pictures of late, she is the image of that soul of sweet and purring serenity, Margot Asquith. . . .

"Nancy's idea of democracy is to bandy rough-and-ready repartee with the lower orders of society in political meetings and, although there have been moments when the simple navvies or ditch-diggers of England have hollered 'Good Old Nancy!' there is none of that nonsense about the simple fraternity of human beings in the Cliveden set. . . .

"The British Astors and Colonel Charles Lindbergh have been chumming it of late in Great Britain, and after the word came out of Cliveden that the British prime minister would please be good enough to do thus-and-so, it developed that the American Lindbergh had dipped his bill into the councils which had led up to this super-royal decree.

"All this government policy may have been good policy, and it may be that the apostate Americans of Cliveden in council with Colonel Lindbergh, the absentee American, give the poor British a better government than they could give themselves, if they possessed the authority as well as the form of government.

"But anyone who knows the British will understand that they must have a stuffy sense of fed-upness with this imported government, and we in this country will have to admit that our problem with the British lecturers, even the Communists among them, is nothing compared to that of the British people under our expatriate fox hunters.

"So 'ere's wery good 'ealth to the poor British, good hunting and all such as that, and yoicks, thrice over, to 'er precious Grice, Viscountess Nancy Astor, and all 'er kin, to 'oom the poor British are damn welcome."

Pegler reflected opinion of the hour in the States; it seemed that Lord and Lady Astor were held jointly responsible for "the rout of the democracies." Never had English Astor stock sunk so low in their native land. Neither Waldorf nor Nancy could afford longer to ignore the rising tide of American resentment which threatened Anglo-American co-operation and hegemony. So in the *Saturday Evening Post* of March 4, 1939 appeared Nancy's defence of herself, of "Cliveden," and of British foreign policy.

"Cliveden set?" she asked. "There is no such thing! It is a fantastic invention. It has no existence. It never did exist. . . .

"This Communist lie has gone all over the world," she added. "It shows how easy it is, when you have a world-wide organization, to get a lie around quickly. . . . Some of the columnists have implied that my objection to Communism is that this creed threatens wealth. Nothing of the sort! Communism denies God and religion. It breaks up the family. These, to my mind, are the fundamental crimes of Communism. That's why I have fought it as a political faith."

So it turned out that the tale about "the Cliveden set" was all a Communist fabrication to besmirch "a Virginian . . . a democrat and an ardent believer in women's rights and social reforms." Sordid motives had nothing to do with her championship of Germany or hatred of Russia; it was not that Communists threatened wealth, her wealth, but that they threatened God, her God. And if that were not convincing enough, Lady Astor marshalled George Bernard Shaw to her defence, through the pages of *Liberty* the week following her own *Saturday Evening Post* article.

Was it not the concoction of a fevered brain to imagine that the "Cliveden set" met furtively on the great Thames estate to plot the course of empire and hand over Europe to Hitler? Was not the furore over Cliveden a device to personalize devils

for a world anxious to find scapegoats for a tragedy? Had not Lord and Lady Astor been convenient pegs on which to hang responsibility for a shabby episode in history?

Black or red as their hands might be from collaboration with the Brownshirts, they were at most only important members of a ruling class baffled by dilemmas. They could not know just which was the more pressing danger — the swaggering Nazis, the " subtle " Bolsheviks, the leering Japanese, the sullen masses at home. But they sensed that civilization as they knew it was on the verge of some tremendous change. These men and women of goodwill knew that goodwill was not enough to save them, not even goodwill toward the Nazis.

The morbid drama of Czechoslovakia hastened to its final act, and the Astors wrung their hands when it became apparent at last that their plans had miscarried. Hitler, it seemed, was not going eastward after all. In fact he had made a choice: he had compared the complaisant empires and their willing Astors with Russia and had decided the empires were the easier game. The prospect was chilling to Cliveden. The Soviets suddenly seemed the lesser of two evils. Perhaps, if there must be war with Hitler, it would be better to strike up an alliance with the Bolsheviks. With the Westwall made impenetrable since Munich, there was still hope of deflecting the war to the east, where millions of men could fight over the plains of Poland and the Ukraine while the British Navy encompassed the economic defeat of Germany by blockade. Such a war would destroy the Nazis and weaken the Soviets.

Lord Astor's *Observer* was alert to point out the new strategy. " One thing is now certain," wrote Editor Garvin in March 1939, " that without prejudice and doubts England and France should seek a working understanding with Soviet Russia. . . . There is in fact no firmer ally than Russia in defence of freedom." A strange editorial from a pen which a few months earlier had been denouncing the French-Soviet alliance!

Webb Miller, describing the sudden about-face from London, wrote that " Russia's leaders are not entirely free from a suspicion that certain British interests have felt that plenty of critical problems could be solved automatically ' if Germany

and Russia got into war and wore each other out.' " The Soviets held off when the Polish government refused to implement the alliance by allowing Russian troops on her soil.

When it became apparent that neither Germany nor Russia could be depended upon, Chamberlain turned to court America. Lord Lothian, the one figure in England closest to Lord and Lady Astor, who as a youth had been for " a close and perfect understanding between Great Britain and the United States," who in later years as head of the Rhodes empire-building scholarships trust had been in friendly touch with American educational circles, was detailed as Ambassador to Washington. Lothian, a charming, humane person of goodwill, declared himself whole-heartedly for a European Union based on the principles of the American Union. He was a staunch adherent of Clarence Streit's plan for a union of the democracies now. But the immediate task, he felt, was the creation of " an invincible democratic control of the seas " by the American and British Navies, a favourite Astorian policy.

By May 1939 the Czech Republic had been destroyed and Poland was earmarked for Hitler's attention. Lord Astor was panicky. He sat down to compose one last desperate appeal to the Nazis:

" Today any attempt to make concessions to Reichsfuehrer Adolf Hitler, unless accompanied by all-around (including German) disarmament, would be bitterly resented by a vast majority.

" Anyone reading German newspapers or listening to German broadcasts can see that a policy of unilateral appeasement or semblance of vacillation is seized up by Joseph Goebbels' propaganda machinery to convince doubting Germans that we do not mean business and that we will yield to squeeze, and to make other countries doubt the value of our guarantees.

" A conference with Nazi pistols pointed at one's head can lead to no good end. There must be a cessation of military and economic threats and of the stirring up of discontent in other countries. These evidences of good faith and readiness for mutual concessions are essential to a successful conference. Will they be forthcoming? "

It was as if Lord Astor, a sadly disappointed man, sat waiting in his home in St. James's Square for some sign from Berlin — but none came. Hitler had only contempt for appeasers. Nancy was worried. "Dictators," she said, "are like lunatics at large. . . . We can never tell what will happen." That was the trouble: Hitler could not be trusted.

It was about this time that Major Astor announced that he would not again be a candidate for Commons. It was said that he hankered for what his brother had spurned in vain, a lordship.

The Dover Division Conservative and Unionist Association expressed its regret for his decision, and "heartfelt gratitude" to him and Lady Violet for their many kindnesses. Peculiarities of democracy in Britain were underlined once again when the second son of the late Admiral Beatty announced that he would like to become Dover's M.P. The Honourable Peter Beatty was wealthy, handsome, and had won the Derby in 1938.

But soon there were to be more pressing problems in Parliament than Lady Astor's warnings about the dangers of the Popular Front or Major Astor's desire to relinquish his seat. War was breaking out. The Polish government sent agitated appeals to London for the "immediate assistance" promised her by treaty. But none came, and Poland stumbled into a shambles worse than Czechoslovakia's. Britain once again declared war on Germany.

And as before, Lord and Lady Astor offered Cliveden to the government as a hospital, to be used by a new generation of Canadians. There would be a new "Cliveden set," with younger faces, tortured faces. But because there was no immediate flow of victims from the battlefields, the majestic establishment saw service as a refuge for children evacuated from London. The house on St. James's Square was closed. There was little need now for either splendid country or city homes. Political controls were shifting; Winston Churchill, no friend of the Astors, was in the Cabinet. Some said and many felt that those forces which had befriended Hitler could not wage an effective war against him. It seemed that the Astor star was waning.

As for Nancy, she wrung her hands and asked: "Must every generation have a Cenotaph of its own?" In Parliament she begged that champagne be classed as a non-essential commodity, and created a scene when she demanded that women who had lived unmarried with soldiers be denied the usual war allowance to soldiers' dependants. Commons was in an uproar, Nancy shouted retorts, but the Speaker sternly shut off debate.

As in the prior war, she had responsibilities to her native land in this one. Mrs. George Horace Lorimer, president of the Republican Women of Pennsylvania, had started a fund for the evacuated children of English soldiers. Writing to her, Nancy said:

"It isn't possible for one over here to see the situation from your perspective or to judge what America should or should not do.

"Certainly we are fighting for the ideals on which the American Constitution is based — man's inalienable right to self-government, reason and conscience. I suppose the question is, what would America do if she stood for her principles without any material consideration? I think I know. . . . It's a fight for ideals and principles. Never have we seen anything like the grim determination of every one here. They have a feeling about this war that is really sublime. But over here we hate it. I can hardly look at my sons in their uniforms."

Several months later she looked with pleasure, however, on thirty young American aviators in Royal Air Force uniforms. "The British Empire, backed by the United States," she reassured the volunteers, "cannot fail."

"Thousands of young Americans," she added, "are longing to get into this war. It is right that they should."

Legal counsel for Lord Astor and Major Astor could agree, for they were studying with deep concern proposals in the United States that their clients' Manhattan real estate be pledged to finance British war purchases. Unless America joined in the war, it was apparent that the same nightmare which had troubled the first Lord Astor in 1916 — the confiscation of his American estate to pay war costs — would return to

haunt the second Lord and his brother. Fortunately there were friends in America who could be depended upon to see that America gave aid freely to the mother-democracy, rather than exact the pound of flesh from the Astor Estate.

At the same time the Astors' American cousin, Vincent, was doing his bit for the Empire. He promptly offered the use of his Bermuda land to the government for use as small holdings for the duration of the war. His spirit was praised and his land accepted.

Lord Astor himself was installed as Lord Mayor of Plymouth, with ancient golden chains of office around his neck. The spirit of Sir Francis Drake, patron of Plymouth, still lived, said the new Lord Mayor, and "makes us the world defenders of those privileges our ancestors won for the world."

Their four sons (and Lady Astor's son, Robert Gould Shaw III, by her first marriage) shifted into uniform for duty against a power which their parents had helped to build up into the modern Attila. Bill reported to the Navy, Michael to the Territorials, John Jacob VII to the Life Guards (his uncle's regiment). They were to tear down the Colossus which had been erected, with Astorian blessing, through the fortification of the Rhineland, the building of the new German Army, the swallowing of Austria and Czechoslovakia.

"They are men now and they are going to do their part in the struggle for freedom," said Nancy.

Or so it seemed. For the stage was dark and shadowy and the figures dim in this twentieth-century *Götterdämmerung*.

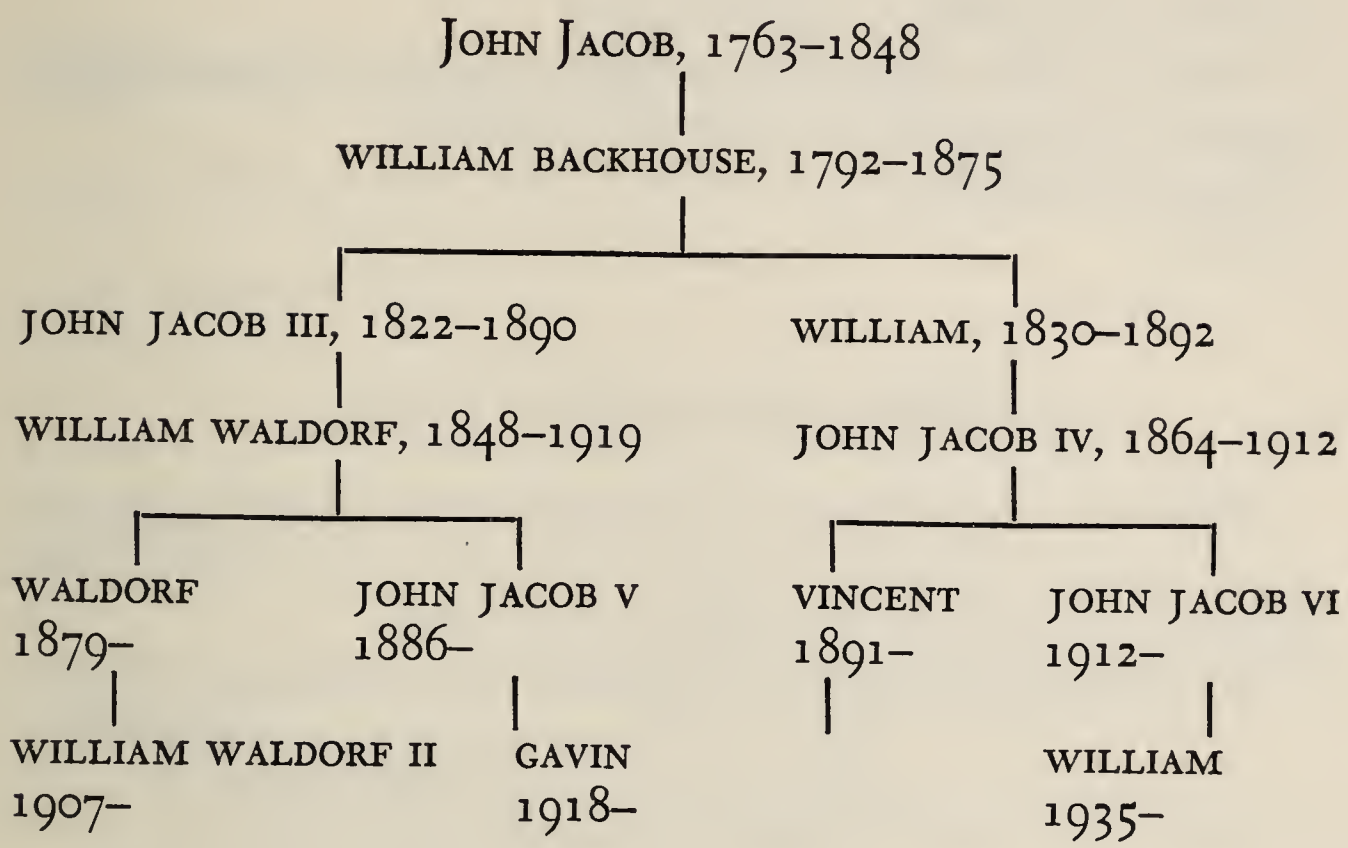
Neither Lord nor Lady nor Major Astor could know what the climax might be to this awful tragedy. Charming, kindly people of goodwill, they had yearned for peace and better nutrition and improved schools in the slums. Twenty years before, they had been apostles for a better world. Nancy Astor had been Woman Personified, gay, courageous, appealing, a symbol beckoning humanity forward.

Bedraggled now were their dreams in the mire of an unavailing appeasement. All they had succeeded in doing was to tear their moral pretensions from themselves. They stood then re-

vealed as cynical figures who had bargained with the devil, and lost. But they had done what they could to safeguard the millions that the Founder had bequeathed to them. And in that they were loyal to the spirit of old John Jacob Astor, who dearly loved money and believed fondly that it would make his descendants happy.

The House of Astor

DESCENT IN THE MALE LINE



John Jacob Astor and His Children

JOHN JACOB ASTOR, 1763–1848, m. SARAH TODD, *ca.* 1762–1834

1. MAGDALEN, 1788–1832, m. { ADRIAN BENTZON / JOHN BRISTED
2. SARAH, 1790, d. young
3. JOHN JACOB II, 1791–*ca.* 1869
4. WILLIAM BACKHOUSE, 1792–1875, m. MARGARET REBECCA ARM-[STRONG, 1798–9?—1872
5. DOROTHEA, 1795–1853, m. WALTER LANGDON
6. HENRY, 1797–1799
7. ELIZA, 1801–1838, m. COUNT VINCENT RUMPFF
8. BOY, 1802, d. unchristened

William Backhouse Astor and His Children

WILLIAM BACKHOUSE ASTOR, 1792–1875, m. MARGARET REBECCA ARMSTRONG, 1798–9?—1872

1. EMILY, 1819–1841, m. SAM WARD, JR.
2. JOHN JACOB III, 1822–1890, m. CHARLOTTE AUGUSTA GIBBES
3. LAURA, 1824–1902, m. FRANKLIN H. DELANO
4. ALIDA, 1826–1881, m. JOHN CAREY
5. WILLIAM, 1830–1892, m. CAROLINE WEBSTER SCHERMERHORN
6. HENRY, 1830–1918, m. MALVINA DINEHART
7. SARAH, 1832–1832

William Astor and His Children

WILLIAM, 1830–1892, m. CAROLINE WEBSTER SCHERMERHORN, 1831–1908

1. EMILY, 1854–1881, m. JAMES J. VAN ALEN
2. HELEN SCHERMERHORN, 1855–1893, m. JAMES ROOSEVELT ROOSEVELT
3. CHARLOTTE AUGUSTA, 1858–1920, m. { JAMES COLEMAN DRAYTON / GEORGE OGILVY HAIG }
4. CAROLINE SCHERMERHORN, 1861–, m. MARSHALL ORME WILSON
5. JOHN JACOB IV, 1864–1912, m. { AVA LOWLE WILLING / MADELEINE TALMAGE FORCE }

The English Astors

WILLIAM WALDORF (first Lord Astor), 1848–1919, m. MARY DAHLGREN PAUL, 1854–1894

1. (WILLIAM) WALDORF (second Lord Astor), 1879–, m. NANCY LANGHORNE SHAW, 1879–
2. PAULINE, 1880–, m. H. H. SPENDER-CLAY, 1875–1937
3. JOHN RUDOLPH, 1881–1881
4. JOHN JACOB V, 1886–, m. LADY VIOLET NAIRNE
5. GWENDOLYN ENID, 1889–1902

John Jacob IV and His Children

JOHN JACOB IV, 1864–1912, m. { AVA LOWLE WILLING / MADELEINE TALMAGE FORCE

1. (by first wife) VINCENT, 1891–, m. { HELEN DINSMORE HUNTINGTON / MARY CUSHING
2. (by first wife) AVA ALICE MURIEL, 1902–, m. { SERGE OBOLENSKY / RAIMUND VON HOFMANNSTHAL
3. (by second wife) JOHN JACOB VI, 1912–, m. ELLEN TUCK [FRENCH

3a. WILLIAM, 1935–

Emily Astor Ward and Her Descendants

EMILY ASTOR, 1819–1841, m. SAM WARD, JR.

1. MARGARET ASTOR WARD, 1838–1875, m. JOHN WINTHROP CHAN- [LER

1a. JOHN ARMSTRONG CHANLER (CHALONER), b. 1862
1b. WINTHROP ASTOR CHANLER, b. 1863
1c. ELIZABETH WARD CHAPMAN, b. 1866
1d. WILLIAM ASTOR CHANLER, b. 1867
1e. LEWIS STUYVESANT CHANLER, b. 1869
1f. MARGARET LIVINGSTON ALDRICH, b. 1870
1g. ROBERT WINTHROP CHANLER, b. 1872
1h. ALIDA BEEKMAN EMMET, b. 1873

Dorothea Astor and Her Children

DOROTHEA, 1795–1853, m. WALTER LANGDON

1. SARAH SHELBURNE, 1814–1897, m. BARON BOREEL
2. JOHN, 1816–1837
3. ELIZA, 1818–1899, m. MATTHEW WILKS
4. LOUISA DOROTHEA, 1820–?, m. OLIVER DE LANCEY KANE
5. WALTER, 1822–1894, m. CATHARINE LIVINGSTON
6. WOODBURY, 1824–1892, m. HELEN COLFORD JONES
7. CECILIA, 1827–?, m. JEAN DE NOTTBECK
8. EUGENE, 1830–1866, m. HARRIET LOWNDES

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